



# THE JESSE JAMES STORIES

## ORIGINAL NARRATIVES OF THE JAMES BOYS

Issued Weekly. By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at New York Post Office by STREET & SMITH, 238 William St., N. Y.

No. 16.

Price, Five Cents.

### JESSE JAMES ON THE MISSISSIPPI

#### THE DUEL AT MIDNIGHT



JESSE JAMES AND HIS OPPONENT STOOD THERE CALMLY AWAITING THE SIGNAL THAT MIGHT MEAN DEATH.



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No. 16.

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Price Five Cents.

# Jesse James on the Mississippi;

OR,

## THE DUEL AT MIDNIGHT.

By W. B. LAWSON.

### CHAPTER I.

#### DOWN THE MISSISSIPPI.

The good steamboat *Arkansas*, bound from St. Louis to New Orleans, had a heavy load of freight and a goodly number of passengers aboard bound for the Crescent City.

It was just a few days previous to the grand holiday season in New Orleans in the year 187—.

On board the *Arkansas* were a number of people bound for the spectacle.

Every boat or train arriving swelled the number of strangers far up into the thousands.

These pilgrims made a motley crowd.

The majority of them were pure tourists or pleasure-seekers, bound to take in the strange sights of the Southern festival.

Others might be set down as commercial drummers, anxious to dispose of goods.

There was a considerable sprinkling of blacklegs in the throng, for New Orleans has, unfortunately, long held the palm of being the gamblers' paradise.

There the most palatial gaming palaces of the country were to be found—here heavy stakes were the rule, and in this city lay the home of the greatest gift-gambling enterprise ever known, the Louisiana State Lottery.

Considering these facts it would not seem at all odd to

find a sprinkling of blacklegs among the passengers on the good steamboat *Arkansas*.

They naturally came together and started their game, as soon as the early darkness gathered over the river and shut the shores from view.

Heavy clouds rolled overhead.

The clang of the boat's machinery, and the whirl of the water thrown up by her wheel were the only sounds to be heard.

Lights gleamed over the steamboat fore and aft—from a short distance she must have presented a beautiful appearance—an illuminated moving palace.

Tongues of fire occasionally shot out upon the water when the furnaces received their food.

The *Arkansas* still burned wood, though most of the New Orleans packets used coal, and left a black cloud of smoke upon the river behind them.

Supper was called just as the distant shores were blotted out of sight.

A rush was made for the table in true American style, each man seeming to think he would be cheated out of his share unless he gathered a goodly supply in front of him.

Seated at one end of the table was a planter.

His appearance indicated the wealthy gentleman, and he looked like one who before the war must have been the owner of a great many slaves.

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This was Colonel Ambrose Randolph, a connection of the Virginia Randolphs.

Next to him sat his nephew, Ferdinand.

On his other hand was his niece—a brunette, handsome as Southern girls generally are, and with considerable common sense written on her face.

Further down came a miscellaneous collection, tourists and blacklegs mixed.

A few among them merit closer attention, as they are to assume a part of our story.

Not far from Edith Randolph sat a man perhaps above the medium in height, with a frame indicating strength rather than Apollo-like beauty.

This quiet individual seemed to mind his own business, and at present this was to supply the inner man with a goodly supply of such fare as the steward provided.

Next to him sat a young man, with a plain but good face, who would make friends by his cheery disposition.

He had registered on the books as Jack Anderson, and was well known to the officers of the boat.

Not a great while before, Jack had been regarded as a prospective man of wealth on the Lower Mississippi, but his father foolishly became entangled in certain speculations, and died, leaving the old plantation home heavily incumbered.

Where his wealth had vanished was a mystery.

Jack was now engaged in the honorable but laborious task of freeing his homestead of debt.

As he ate at the long table more than one expressive glance passed between Edith and himself, showing that the young people were lovers, separated perhaps by the stern decree of her uncle and guardian.

When her uncle caught Jack's eye, the scowl he gave the young planter proved that his feelings certainly were not of the same character as those entertained by the lovely Southern girl.

Just beyond Jack came two men, one of whom was a gambler of much notoriety.

Judge Jerrold had for twenty years plied his black trade on the Mississippi River.

Sometimes he ran a palatial house in New Orleans, and when in a spirit of rashness he had squandered a fortune, he would take to the river.

Traveling up to St. Louis and back, he never failed to rake in enough money to once more put him on his feet.

A more clever rogue never was known on the great river.

In appearance he was pretty much of a gentleman, dressing with good taste, and having a smooth face save for a white mustache, and heavy hair, also bleached by age.

To look at him one would think this man a venerable law expounder, and this idea would be strengthened upon hearing his name.

Truth to tell, there was seldom known a more cold-blooded blackleg than this venerable man.

He could fleece a young dupe with the coolest assurance in the world, and if the affair came to a matter of pistols, Jerrold did not shrink.

If his past could be traced, it would be found to be marked with violence and evil deeds for long years.

The man beside him was associated with him in the business which engaged his attention, and it certainly

looked as though Jim Mullane might be a good second to the wily Jerrold.

This about completes the circuit.

The characters being introduced, it is now high time to ring up the curtain.

When supper had been finished the passengers separated, some going outside for a little walk in the cool night air, while the majority gathered about the stoves at either end of the cabin.

They became more sociable, since the warfare on the common enemy, food, had been victorious.

General conversation ensued.

Soon the judge proposed a game.

A number were eager to accommodate him, and presently cards were brought forth.

Money appeared on the table.

Gambling was not tabooed on board the *Arkansas*, and great interest soon manifested itself.

Even a dominie on his way South, while shaking his head sadly at the awful scene, craned his neck to discover who raked in the last jackpot, and before he knew it became an interested spectator.

All who looked on could not be said to approve of the business, but that did not keep them from having curiosity enough to watch.

Sometimes it is wise to learn the tricks of the devil in order to defeat him.

Ignorance of vice does not qualify a man to be a good police officer or a judge.

He must pick up these facts, not necessarily by experience, but through observation.

Colonel Randolph was a deeply interested looker on.

Unfortunately he had once been very fond of cards, and although for many years this spirit had slumbered, it was ready to break out when he thought it conquered forever.

His niece had retired to her stateroom, and knew nothing of what was going on, else her influence might have had some restraint upon the old man.

This was in the beginning. Once he plunged into the fascinating game nothing short of an eruption could drag him away.

His nephew urged him on.

There were certain signals that passed between this man and the gamblers, showing the existence of some plot or agreement.

The party who sat between them at the supper table—he with the rather thin face and quiet ways—was watching this by-play.

He seemed interested.

By and by he ran across Jack Anderson, who was moving through the cabin.

"I believe you know Colonel Randolph," the stranger remarked.

Jack looked at him quickly.

"Yes, I do."

"Are you interested in his welfare?"

"Well, in a measure, yes."

"I understand; he frowns upon your suit; but he's the uncle of the young lady, and that brings him closer to you."

"What does all this concern you, sir?"

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"Not in the least; but I thought you might wish to do something in the matter."

"What matter?"

"The colonel is in danger of being fleeced."

"Pshaw! he has played before."

"Not with these men."

"With others, then, just as shrewd."

"Perhaps so."

"Besides, he can afford to lose a few thousands."

"Ah! they will not stop at that."

"But the colonel will."

"He has been drinking just enough to heat his blood. Already he gives evidence of sticking to the board to the end."

Jack moved uneasily.

"I believe that infernal nephew has had a hand in this business," he muttered.

The other caught his words.

"Your suspicions are not far wrong."

"Then you know—"

"There is a combination against the colonel, a plot to ruin him, and this is the first step in it."

"Come, this is serious."

"He will find it so before these men are done with him."

"Who are you, sir?"

"You can call me John Smith."

Evidently any other name would answer just as well for him; at least Jack Anderson took it in that way.

"What interest have you in that business?"

"That of common humanity. I dislike to see a man fleeced in a cowardly fashion."

Anderson hardly knew what to make of the matter. This man was a stranger, but what he said might be the truth; indeed, Jack was much inclined to believe it all.

"What can be done?"

"Have you no influence over the colonel?"

"He'd resent my interference with an oath. I am already at zero in his regard, and can't afford to utterly extinguish my last chance with him."

"How about the girl?"

"What of her?"

"Suppose she should come out and endeavor to coax him to stop playing?"

"It might be tried, but you don't know the old colonel. He has a will of his own."

"So I supposed. If that fails there is only one other way of accomplishing it."

"And that?"

"Is to frighten off the wolves."

"Meaning the judge and his confederate?"

"Exactly."

"You don't know them."

"Perhaps not."

"They don't scare worth a cent. I don't believe a loaded howitzer would frighten that man."

"There are ways of reaching a result other than forcibly," said the other, significantly.

"What you say is true."

"Then let us form a rival combination, you and myself, with the intention of saving the colonel."

"I understand he has a large sum of money with him on this occasion."

The stranger's eyes glittered.

"Yes, and that must be kept out of the hands of these river sharks."

"Shake hands on it. That resolution does you credit, sir. Although Colonel Randolph is my enemy, in one sense, I am ready to do him a favor—to save him from these gamblers."

"Of course, there's nothing selfish in your actions, young man, only Edith—"

"Has her own fortune; she expects nothing from her uncle. My only fear is that he may lose her money as well as his own. When a man becomes crazed with the gambling fever, the line between honor and knavery grows very faint."

"Shall the experiment with the girl be tried?"

"If you think best."

"Should it fail, meet me up on the hurricane deck, near the smoke-stacks, and we will talk over the matter. Perhaps I can give you a few points that may open the way to a new scheme."

"You are very kind," said Jack, as he left his newfound friend and proceeded in the direction of the ladies' cabin.

The man looked after him with a peculiar smile.

"Pretty well hooked, I reckon!" he muttered.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE GAME THWARTED.

Attention being so thoroughly occupied in the quarter where the gambling was going on, no one noticed Jack as he sauntered back to the ladies' cabin—divided from the main saloon by curtains not yet drawn.

Edith was not in sight.

He knew the number of her stateroom, and presently knocked upon the door.

It opened.

"What! You, Jack!"

He pressed the small hand in rapture.

"Edith, darling, I only want to say a few words. Your uncle is playing heavily in the other cabin. There is a conspiracy to ruin him. By mere accident I heard of it."

"Can you not warn him?" she asked, hastily.

"Yes; but he would curse me for a meddler. You know he bears me no love."

"Then I will try."

"Do so. If you fail, perhaps we may find other means of breaking up this conspiracy."

"I will go."

"Be sure not to let him know where you received your information."

"I will be careful. Perhaps Ferdinand—"

"Don't trust him, Edith."

"What! my cousin!"

"I am informed that he is in the conspiracy, if not at the head of it."

"But what motive could he have?"

"I see several. What I believe most is that he wants your guardian in the heat of play to squander part of your fortune. Then he can dictate terms to him with respect to—. Well, you understand what I mean, Edith."

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The puzzled look on her face gave way to one of pain and sorrow.

"He used to love me. Can he have forgotten the affection of the past? But, even at the risk of incurring his anger, I will try to save him."

She glided down the cabin.

Jack passed out, up to the hurricane deck, where, through a partly open skylight or transom, he could see and hear all that was occurring below.

The colonel, intent on his play, did not notice Edith's presence until she laid a hand on his arm.

"Ah! good-night, child."

He thought she had come to give him the usual affectionate kiss, not thinking what a difference the presence of these men must make.

Instead, she bent over and whispered something.

The colonel's face grew even redder.

"Never mind me, Edith. Go to bed, child."

Instead, she repeated her entreaties.

He grew angry.

The liquor that Ferdinand had pressed on him earlier in the evening controlled his actions.

He roughly bade her go to her room.

The high-spirited girl seemed tempted to denounce the men who played with her uncle, but catching a look on the face of her cousin, she remembered what Jack had said, and bit her lip.

With keen sorrow and humiliation she left the scene, shutting herself in her stateroom.

The attempt had been a failure.

If the conspiracy to release the colonel from the gambler's clutches was to prove successful a different method must be brought into play.

Jack realized this.

A hand clutched his shoulder, and turning, he found himself face to face with the stranger.

"She made a gallant attempt, Anderson."

"But failed."

"Yes, you were right. What, with the brandy he has swallowed, and his old love for play revived, the colonel has fallen head over heels into the pit."

"Can we get him out?"

"That's a hard job. When a man has sided with his enemies, to save him requires heroic treatment."

"Well?"

"I hinted to you before that there was another way of scaring these hawks away."

"Yes."

"I chance to know something about this Judge Jerrold which I can hold over his head. He was concerned in an affair once, and thinks no person knows of it."

Jack nodded.

"I begin to understand what you mean."

"When I whisper the facts in his ear you'll see his knees weaken and his ruddy face pale."

"Then it must be something dreadful."

"Well, it was a pretty bad job, and I reckon the man has spent more than one sleepless night thinking about it."

"You think he will give in?"

"Wait and see."

"Mr. John Smith, do you know what I think?"

"No," with a smile that appeared bland, as seen by the light swung on the flagstaff astern.

"That your name should have been something else."

The man shrugged his shoulders.

"What, for instance?"

"Well, say Silas Ketchem."

"Why that?"

"It would be appropriate to your profession."

"What do you take me for?"

"A detective."

"Ah!"

"Am I far away?"

"Perhaps I had better confide in you, Jack. Such is my trade. I don't care to state my name, but it is known through the whole land. I've a faculty for finding out certain facts and improving opportunities that come into my hands."

Later on these words came back to the young planter with startling force.

When seen under the new lights that future revelations cast upon them the words appeared doubly significant.

"I understand how you knew about this conspiracy. Your business brought you into conflict with these men."

"Never mind that now. What I want to ask is, are you with me in this matter?"

"Heart and soul."

"Good. The sooner I put a stop to the game down yonder"—jerking his thumb toward the cabin—"the more money the colonel will have for other legitimate debts."

"What part am I to play in it?"

"Only this: I have a friend on board; he will back me up if necessary, and look out for Mullane."

"That's the other blackleg?"

"Yes."

"Well?"

"You keep an eye on Mr. Ferdinand. He's staked a heap on this deal, and if he sees us covering his confederates, perhaps he may take a notion to enter the game also."

"I'll keep him out."

"You are armed, Jack?"

"I reckon few men in the South go without a revolver these days."

"That is all right. We'll go below."

They had just passed down the stairs leading to the main deck when a shadowy figure came out from behind the smoke-stacks.

The darkness had concealed him, and no doubt this party must have overheard all that passed between the two men, since he had been within five feet of them all the while.

A chuckling sound escaped his lips, as though something pleased him mightily.

"After all, 'twas lucky the cool air up here forced me to hug the pipes. Interesting affair this. We'll see how it comes out."

With this remark to himself, the listener descended and entered the warm cabin.

The big game went on.

Evidently the colonel had become enamored with his play.

He had begun to wager large sums.

Those who looked on saw nothing wrong in the business; sometimes one side won and again the other; if the preponderance of success was in favor of the gamblers, why, some one had to win.

There were secret signals given the gamblers, by a confederate, and hardly a deal passed that both of them did not know exactly what the old planter held in his hand.

Besides, with their feet they let each other understand what cards they held.

He was at their mercy.

This confederate might have passed unsuspected by any one, since he was none other than the pretended dominie whose face was continually filled with a shocked look while he watched the men play.

In the midst of the game, while the colonel, with a grim face that bespoke of his obstinacy, was counting out a thousand dollars from his pile to wager on his hand, the man who had told Jack he was a detective, stepped up to the white-haired gambler and bending over said something in a low tone.

Whatever it was the judge started and uttered an oath as he glanced up.

His hand was half way back to his pistol pocket when his eyes came in contact with the gleaming orbs of the other.

Something about them seemed to fascinate him.

His eager hand fell pulseless at his side and all his ferocity vanished.

It was a most astonishing change.

What could have caused this?

The gambler seemed to expostulate.

His master pressed the matter, and would not give up an inch.

Then the judge seemed to plead.

It was useless.

The law was laid down; he must obey.

He glanced from Mullane to his other confederate, as though filled with a sudden thought of resistance against his fate.

"Don't do it, judge. I've got friends here, and their revolvers are ready to fly out at a second's notice. We'll make this cabin swim in blood. You know me."

"Yes, I know you," muttered the other.

"Give it up, then. Perhaps I'll let you in on another game."

"You're determined?"

"It's either that or die."

"I ain't ready for that yet. Well, if I must there ain't any help for it."

These words were spoken in low tones, so that no one else heard.

The judge arose.

"Gentlemen, I am sorry to say I must quit the game."

"The devil!" ejaculated Mullane.

"Nonsense. Sit down, judge. I won't hear of it," declared the testy colonel.

"Nevertheless, I am compelled to do so; I have just heard some news that totally unfits me for play. You must excuse me. Perhaps some other gentleman will occupy my place."

No one offered to do so.

The game, with its high stakes, had assumed such a

phase that ordinary men were debarred from taking a hand in it.

All were surprised at the sudden breaking up of what promised to be a great game.

They could not understand it, and various speculations were indulged in.

Some believed the unknown party to be a friend of the colonel, who was bound to save him against himself.

Others declared him to be an officer of the steamboat line, and that gambling was to be stopped on board the vessels hereafter.

His manner was of one having authority.

Still, no one seemed to know him. He moved about in a quiet way.

Jack Anderson had seen the gambling party disperse with feelings of satisfaction.

He felt as though Edith's little fortune had passed through a crisis, and not only that, but the plots of her cousin baffled.

It was his desire to let the young girl know that, although her individual efforts to save her uncle from robbery had failed, they had managed the matter in another way.

This he succeeded in doing, without any one being the wiser for it, by scratching on the lattice of her window from the outside.

It was an old signal between them, and Edith answered, so that they were able to hold a short whispered conversation, although not seeing each other, or having the power to clasp hands.

Jack felt good.

He had won a round in the fight for Edith, and her plotting cousin must realize that the fates were not all in his favor.

What would he do next?

It would only be a short time ere Edith must come of age, when she could select a husband of her own choice, and not be coerced by guardian and uncle.

To bridge over this period was what worried Jack.

His enemy was vigilant and active.

He was not the man to be cast down by one failure, no matter how serious.

Other schemes would come up in rapid succession, and only the utmost vigilance could save Edith from the fate that threatened.

Jack had left the cabin again, and was pacing up and down the deck, pondering over the matter.

The clang of the engines sounded strangely upon the night air, supplemented by the hissing of steam from the escape pipes, and the whir of the wheel as it churned the turbid water of the mighty river.

As the vehicle of river navigation sped southward toward her goal—the city where strange scenes have occurred during two wars, where Jackson defeated the British regulars in times gone by—the whole boat trembled under the regular pulsations of her great engines.

Although the days of racing were practically over at this period—happily so—still a spirit of honest rivalry compelled the captains of steamboats to bring forward their best work, and the trip was generally made as rapidly as possible.

Jack, walking to and fro, with his knit brows telling of

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deep thought, was surprised to find an arm pulled through his own.

It was hardly light enough to distinguish features, but he had an idea as to whom this might be.

"Well, what news now, John Smith?" he asked.

"I have something to tell you, Mr. Anderson."

The voice was that of a stranger.

## CHAPTER III.

PAUL SMITH.

Jack Anderson was, of course, somewhat surprised when he realized this fact.

"I have made a mistake; I thought you were another person," he said, hastily.

"I am here to speak to you about that party."

"Are you the friend he mentioned?"

At this the unknown laughed. It was a peculiar cachination, soft and silky.

"Well, hardly. To tell the truth, I don't believe that John Smith has a more bitter foe than myself."

This fact caused the young planter new surprise.

"Why do you come to me?"

"To warn you, sir."

"What of?"

"You are treading on dangerous ground."

Like most young Southerners, Jack was hot-blooded, and quick to resent a fancied insult.

"Be careful of what you say, sir. That man, John Smith, is my friend."

"Had you ever met him before you came on board this steamboat?"

"Does that concern you?"

"Not at all; but it affects your welfare."

"Then I don't mind telling you that I never saw the gentleman until he came aboard at Vicksburg, and had not exchanged a word with him until about an hour ago."

The stranger chuckled.

"I thought so."

"At the same time I consider him my friend."

"Why should you?"

"He has done me a service."

"You are wrong."

"In what way, sir?"

"Although you know it not, the obligation was on his side—it was you who did the service for him."

"Nonsense. You saw him save the colonel."

"That was determined on before he met you. Perhaps I might astonish you by telling you why he routed the wily judge and his forces."

"Then do so."

"You are becoming interested, Mr. Anderson."

"Yes, a little."

"I am glad of that. I want you to believe me, for unless I am mistaken I shall need your assistance in order to save the colonel's money."

"Good Heavens! again?"

"This time from even a more positive danger than the one that threatened it before."

"You mystify me, sir."

"Walk this way to where we can be more sure of not being interrupted."

The planter obeyed.

His emotions were of a singular order—a medley thoughts flashed through his mind.

Who was this man?

What had he to do with the game?

What was he about to divulge?

Jack confessed to considerable impatience with respect to the matter.

The stranger led the way to the extreme bow, where no one could be seen.

Here, sheltered behind some freight from the coast, night breeze, they could talk.

"Now explain your meaning, friend."

"I gave you to understand that this man saved the colonel's money because he has a personal interest in the matter. To be brief, he hopes to possess that himself."

"This is startling news."

"There is more to follow."

"Then continue."

"You believe him to be a detective?"

"Such was my idea—he owned up to the fact."

"Of course he did. Now, tell me the truth, that man is no more a detective than you are."

"He deceived me, then."

"As he has many a person before now. His life has been made up of it."

"You know him?"

"Well—yes. It is principally on this account I am on this boat making the trip to New Orleans."

"Who are you?"

The stranger laughed.

"John Smith stole my thunder, and yet I desire to have you know the truth. Call me Ketchem."

"The deuce! you claim to be a detective, too?"

"Yes, I make the claim—you forced it upon him, you will remember. My case is different; I refer you to Captain Lawrence and the first clerk of this boat as to my identity."

"What may be your name?"

"It might be John Smith—but it chances I was called Paul by my parents."

"Paul Smith?"

"Yes—that and nothing more."

"Well, this is a queer thing you tell me. So I have been taken in and done for by a fraud. Have you any idea with regard to the way in which he intends to rob the colonel?"

"I have a pretty good outline of the plan. It is a great affair, with some complications, as you will soon learn when it begins to develop."

"The result is the same as though these gamesters had finished their scheme?"

"Practically—yes, only in this case the colonel's life is endangered also."

"You don't mean it."

"There may be a duel fought."

"On board the boat?"

"Oh! the captain will accommodate, or else the men will take advantage of a landing at some spot where wood is taken aboard. There the tragedy may be carried out."

"Is the money to be secured the only thing that urges this man on?"

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"I have an idea there is something of revenge about it—the settling of some grudge that has been standing since the war."

"Ah," with a sigh, "there have been far too many such debts to pay off in these years since the close of the war—far too many."

"I agree with you there, for I am a Southern man myself, and fought under Joe Johnston, but I have faith to believe time is gradually healing all the wounds, and that we have a wonderful future before us."

"What can I do for you, Mr. Smith?"

"I will let you know later. Just now I am satisfied to have you believe my story. If that man seeks you again, give him no suspicion that you have learned the truth."

"Your advice is sound."

"Being forewarned, you will be able to see through their plans and beg off when they want to make use of you."

"Thanks to you, I shall, and at the same time report what I hear."

"Jack, I see we are going to be friends."

"I like something about you, Paul Smith. Come into the light, and let me take a look at you."

The other laughed.

"Willingly, my friend."

They walked back to the engine, and here the lights burning permitted Jack to get a steady view of his companion's face.

He studied it a minute.

Then, in an impulsive manner, he held out his hand.

"Shake. We must be friends."

"You see nothing in my looks detrimental to my prospects of being a good fellow, eh Jack?"

"I like you, Paul Smith," was the reply.

"Then listen to me. I know your condition, and I shall make an especial effort to have your love affair come out a success."

"Thanks—a thousand thanks!"

"Mind you, I have no especial love for the old warhorse. He might be plucked by sharpers and welcome, for all of me; but I am especially here after the man who called himself John Smith. In order to nab him I am compelled to save the colonel. Besides, I understand your fears that the fortune of his niece may become involved, and that would be a pretty rough thing."

Jack seemed to admire the man more with each passing minute. There was something about him that inspired confidence—a drawing power in his low voice and earnest manner.

"There is one thing you have neglected to tell me," he said, quietly.

"What is that?"

"The name of the man who is carrying out this bold scheme."

"Ah, yes; you mean Smith."

"But his true name?"

"I heard him tell you it was notorious."

"Was that the truth?"

"It is known in every town, village and hamlet along the Mississippi River—indeed, all over the country. A few admire, most men condemn, his actions; but he cares not what is said, going on with his law-breaking all the same; banks and express cars yield him a revenue; men

fear him as they would a devil, and he rules his subjects like a king."

"Good Heavens, Paul Smith! there is but one man who fills that bill."

"Tell me his name. Whisper it low, for even the walls have ears at times. Now."

The young planter breathed in his ears:

"Jesse James!"

Smith nodded his head.

"That man here?" and an expressive shrug of the shoulders ended the sentence.

Jesse James often attended the Mardi Gras carnival.

Only the year before he had been in New Orleans, engaged in a plot that brought him thousands of dollars.

"Now you understand my solicitude," remarked the other, significantly.

"Well, rather. What deviltry has he in view? Does he mean to make the whole of the passengers stand and deliver? This beats holding up a train!"

"Not so loud, please, Jack. The man has friends on board this boat. They might hear you, and get us into a muddle right away. With regard to your question, I don't think he has any such intention at present, although of course there is no telling what such a man won't aim at."

"It wouldn't be worse than many things equally bold he has done in the past."

"You seem to know about him."

"Well, I read the papers, and they have printed many columns about the James boys. I've never met one of them before now."

"And you will probably never want to again, my dear fellow. They are ugly customers to handle, I can assure you."

"Well, remember I'm in this thing for keeps, and when you want me, call out."

"I shall do so. Take my word for it, a startling event is on the bills. This trip of the old *Arkansas* will never be forgotten."

"Where is this man going?"

"You mean Jesse James?"

"Yes."

"To New Orleans, and perhaps to work a little at his trade."

"Of relieving men of their money."

"That's it."

"Very accommodating that. He should be set down as a world's benefactor."

"There's a little good he's done."

"What's that?"

"In relieving the world of a few men about as bad as himself."

"That's a fact."

"There's nothing more to say, Jack."

"Your last instructions are——?"

"Possess your soul in patience, and keep your powder dry."

"Very good."

"Then for the present we part."

A hearty handshake, and the two men thus strangely brought together separated.

They promised to be great friends.

Jack Anderson had received news.

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It was of a startling character indeed, and he was not in much danger of going to sleep.

At this time the James boys were in their prime, and hardly a month passed without some account in the daily papers of a bank robbed, or a train held up, all of which were laid at their door.

Who, then, traveling down the great river on a steamboat, and learning that Jesse James was aboard, could fail to be excited?

The intelligence was enough to stir up the most sluggish blood.

Jack paced the deck above.

His thoughts flew swiftly and furiously.

Of course he was naturally endeavoring to see how he would be benefited by this thing.

Could some action on his part change the feeling with which the old war horse regarded him?

It was possible.

If he valiantly defended the colonel against the latter's foes, how could the soldier help regarding him with feelings other than those he now entertained?

These thoughts were pleasant.

They brought new cheer to his heart, which at times had been close to despair, when watching the game Ferdinand was evidently playing, and calculating its chance of success.

What strange events the near future might hold!

With such a man as Jesse James on board, the boat carried a firebrand that might at any moment, given a cause, drop into the magazine and explode it.

Could all the passengers on board know the truth, it was doubtful whether one of them would have slept a wink that night.

Such appalling stories of the James boys and their doings had gone abroad that there were many who would surely expect to be murdered in cold blood in their berths, the steamboat scuttled, and all on board perish.

It was a good thing, then, that the awful intelligence was confined to a few persons.

Sleep would reign on board the *Arkansas*.

Jack kept up his walk for some time.

Finally he entered the cabin.

A game of cards had been started, in which the judge took a hand, but they played for small stakes now, and much of the interest that had characterized the former game was gone.

At the same time they gave promise of making a night of it.

Jack glanced around.

Was Jesse James on hand?

He caught sight of the man, and mentally compared his form and features with the descriptions he had seen printed of the outlaw of Missouri.

Yes, they tallied.

There could be no reasonable doubt that all Paul Smith had told him was true.

The notorious train robber was on board, bent upon one of his devilish schemes!

## CHAPTER IV.

## A GREAT SCHEME UNFOLDED.

While Jack was watching the man who had deceived him so neatly, he suddenly became aware of the fact that the other was making a secret signal to him.

Evidently he desired to talk.

Jack saw the man saunter down the cabin and drop into a chair at a point where no one was near.

This looked like an invitation.

Should he accept?

What had Paul Smith advised but to keep up his acquaintance with the other, if the chance offered, and learn what he could.

Now, Jack had nothing of the detective in him, and yet he was thrilled at the thought of hunting such great game.

He was something of a sportsman in his way, and he had frequently shot panther and bear in the wild cane-brakes of Louisiana.

This was more dangerous work.

Revolvers would be trumps should an encounter take place here, and revolvers count more than teeth and nails in a close fight.

While he stood there irresolute, a voice breathed close to his ear:

"Why don't you go—he expects you?"

Turning his head, Jack saw Paul Smith five feet away, watching the gamblers.

In passing he had breathed the words.

They decided him.

Yes, he would accept the invitation, and see what Jesse James had to say.

Forewarned is forearmed.

He knew who the other was, and believed he had enough gumption about him to pull the wool over the man's eyes.

As he sauntered down to where the other stood, he could feel his heart throb faster than was its wont; but his feeling of excitement he calmed.

Carelessly he sat down.

Jesse James was reading a paper he had picked up, or making pretense of it, anyhow.

He glanced up.

"I'm glad you came. We can pretend to be talking about something in this paper, so that no one may suspect."

"Suspect—what?"

"Well, you know my mission here—such men as those I hunt are always suspicious, and my actions already tonight may have set them to watching me."

"Ah! I see."

"You wonder why I called you?"

"I did."

"It is easily told—I would like to have your assistance in a little game I am playing."

"Yes."

"Perhaps you may think it a strange combination, but we detectives are accustomed to doing things in a way to mystify others. You can mark it down as all right, anyway."

His assurance was certainly refreshing.

Jack felt a cold shiver pass through his frame at the

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thought of how easily he might have been taken in and done for, but for the warning from Paul Smith.

Only for that, and he might have entered into some villainous scheme, hand in glove with the notorious Jesse James, under the belief that he was serving the ends of justice in some mysterious way.

"Tell me what you mean, John Smith."

"It's a long story—you must excuse me from going into details. You think you know this old soldier pretty well?"

"Colonel Randolph?"

"Yes. He has always had the reputation of being a gentleman of untarnished reputation."

"I never heard anything to the contrary."

"Just so. In times past his reputation was all that it seemed, but of late the colonel, being hard up, has lent his aid to a grand scheme of fraud."

"You surprise me."

"I'll paralyze you, perhaps, when I give you the real facts of the case."

"Go on—I'm prepared."

"You saw him play to-night?"

"Yes."

"He seemed to have a large amount of money along with him."

"I know it."

"And was very angry at being balked in his game; you saw that."

"That was natural, for he had already lost, and was deep in the excitement."

"One thing, I warrant, you didn't see, or if so, paid no attention to."

"What was that?"

"The condition of all his money."

Jack frowned.

"I don't catch on to your meaning."

"It was in bills."

"Yes."

"Nearly all tens."

"Well, as nearly as I can recollect, I believe you are right, but I hardly noticed it at the time."

"If you had looked as closely as I did, young man, you would have made a note of something else; that every one of those ten-dollar bills, though mussed up and soiled, had the appearance of having come freshly from the mint."

"Perhaps—"

"There can be no supposition about the matter. Those bills were counterfeit."

He leaned forward and almost whispered these words; the young planter started.

"Counterfeit! Great Scott! man, what—"

"Hush! not so loud, Mr. Anderson, unless you would give the whole business away."

"But what would you insinuate?"

"Nothing. I boldly affirm that Colonel Ambrose Randolph is at the head of the most gigantic conspiracy to defraud the government ever known in the South or West."

"Making bogus money?"

"Exactly, and the work is so remarkably well done that it will deceive bank tellers."

"I am horrified."

"Naturally so. The man has been above reproach all his life; his family of the best, his war record first-class. It's too bad, but then, you know, it's none of my business. I am hired by the law to run this set of rascals to earth, and I'm bound to do it, no matter who is hurt."

"But is there no chance that he may have been deceived—that this money has been put on him in some way?"

The other shook his head.

"None at all. Randolph is at the head of the league. His arrest will break up the whole business. I'm sorry, but it can't be helped."

"Edith!" muttered Jack.

"She is only his niece. Besides, man, you see your chance has come."

"Mine?"

"Certainly. When her guardian is caged, she will naturally look to you for protection, and we may soon expect to hear the wedding bells."

Jack was astonished.

How did this man know of his private affairs, and thus make it a point to play upon them.

He naturally experienced considerable astonishment at the sagacity of the individual, but could not understand how such an idea as this great cock-and-bull story concerning the counterfeit money could have come into the brain of Jesse James.

How should he act?

The first idea was to continue his game of deceit, and allow Jesse James to rest under the belief that he joined with him in his game.

It could be easily done.

Jack had never been accustomed to doing such things, but he found the task within his powers.

So he went at it.

"We'll let that part of it pass, Mr. Smith. What I am most anxious about just now is the fact of Colonel Randolph descending to the level of common criminals."

He knew this was a secret dig at the man before him, and he meant it.

"There are more men in that class than the world imagines; men who appear outwardly respectable, but inwardly are ravenous wolves and as bad as the worst of—well, these rogues you mention."

Evidently the words of the young planter had rubbed a sore spot.

They forced Jesse James to show his colors.

"What you say is quite true, and I have more respect for the vilest thief who does not profess to be anything else, than for one of these hypocrites. Still, it is hard to believe that a man of the colonel's position would descend so low."

"It is the curse of money. He loves it, and, having lost so much in some unfortunate speculations, he has jumped into this game as the best means for a speedy recovery of his wealth."

"But the danger of discovery?"

"Is very small. These bills are remarkably well executed, as I said before."

"They are counterfeit, though?"

"I'm not so sure of that."

"You called them such."

"Because I have no other name for them; but I have

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a shrewd suspicion that when the truth is found out, they will prove to be duplicates."

"What do you mean?"

"It's my impression that in some mysterious manner this gang has secured a set of the original plates used by the Government, and that these bills are just as genuine as the originals, only they come from the wrong source."

"I see. It is astonishing."

"The question is, are you with me?"

"Do you want my aid?"

"I've taken a notion that way."

"I don't see any objection to joining you, on one condition, sir."

"What is that?"

"You must trust me fully."

"Oh, I mean to do so!"

"I will not work in the dark, obeying blindly whatever orders you may choose to give."

John Smith pretended to be aggrieved.

"Haven't I given you good evidence of the trust I place in you by telling you about this counterfeit league?"

"That is a good beginning."

"You want me to keep it up?"

"Yes."

"Well, I've taken a peculiar fancy to you, my young man, and at the same time I think you can be useful to my plans."

"I have arranged it in a way that promises great success."

"This boat is bound for New Orleans, and we are now below Vicksburg."

"Whatever is done, you understand, must be accomplished before we arrive."

Jack replied that he supposed so.

"Again, you realize that it is of the utmost importance that we prevent the colonel from destroying all evidence of his crime?"

"Yes—go on."

"He carries all his duplicate money in a hand-satchel, which is kept in his stateroom."

"A red Russia-leather bag?"

"Yes."

"With a silver lock?"

"Ah! you have seen it."

"Many a time. The colonel has carried it for years, and it is about as well known along the river as he is."

"Then this bag has fallen into disreputable ways, for, as I said, it is now used to carry bogus money."

"Knowing these facts, I have hit upon a scheme to get possession of this indiscriminating valise. You know we detectives are up to all sorts of dodges in our profession, Mr. Anderson."

"I suppose so."

"You have for a roommate the judge. He will hardly be in his berth to-night, so that you are practically master of the apartment."

"Directly next to you is the stateroom of Colonel Randolph and his nephew."

"These rooms are meant to be thrown into one should a party desire it, and a door between serves as a means of communication."

"Now pay attention, Mr. Anderson, and catch the idea

I advance. It may seem a little odd at first, but when you have looked at it from all sides, as I have done, you will grow to like it."

"I've no doubt of it," quoth Jack, readily.

"Then listen."

He had sunk his voice to almost a whisper, as though fearful lest some enemy might overhear him.

It is singular how conscience makes cowards of men when they are engaged in a black business. They seem to fear lest the very walls have ears to betray them.

Jack was in deep earnest.

He believed that it would be of the utmost importance that he should learn the particulars of the plot, for Paul Smith depended on him.

At the same time, he would not show this intense eagerness.

It might excite anew the suspicions of the man with whom he talked.

He put his feelings under control, and appeared to show just the proper amount of interest in what the other was about to say.

"You know something of Colonel Randolph's fiery character."

"He has in times past been concerned in a number of duels; and although of late years this practice has fallen into disrepute, he would just as readily take part in an affair of honor to-day, if the occasion were forced on him."

"I mean to persuade him to thus indulge."

Jack was surprised, and did not have to assume the expression that came upon his face.

"Fight a duel with Colonel Randolph!"

"Yes."

"You must be a dead shot."

"I am."

"Would you kill him?"

"Oh, no! You don't comprehend this matter. I have a goodly number of things to tell yet."

"There is more connected with the duel. You say you will not kill him. Then he will perform that kind office for you."

Jesse James laughed, as though he considered this quite a joke.

"I'm willing to take my chances," he said, "particularly as there is no danger."

"How is that?"

"If the duel comes to pass, there will be no bullet in his revolver. I have already looked after that part of the business."

"I begin to get a scent at the game."

"Only a glimpse, though."

"You have more to tell?"

"My dear fellow, I shall not tell half of what I have planned, but it may surprise you. Perhaps you will wonder why I have gone to so much trouble in this case."

"I confess that it puzzles me."

"In the first place, the colonel is an influential man in New Orleans, and it would be difficult to get any one to believe any charge against him unless we had positive proof."

"You are quite right."

"I am glad to see you appreciate the situation, friend Jack. Now, take a second thing in the order of events.

He is at the head of this powerful gang, operating through the whole of the Mississippi Valley."

"You mean that they possess influence?"

He bent forward, and whispered hoarsely:

"This league controls the election in many of the Southern States, and no man can go to Congress who antagonizes them."

"Good Heavens! is it so bad as that?"

"Yes, indeed! You begin to understand what I have to contend with here. No wonder I am slow to go about it. Before I arrest that man I must have everything in apple-pie order, and the strongest of chains about him."

"In other words, you will not dare arrest him without securing that bag of money."

"Well, when you come right down to it, that is what it amounts to. That would be positive evidence beyond all dispute."

"How is it to fall into your hands while you are engaged in the duel?"

"That is where I am going to make you useful, Mr. Anderson."

"What! you mean that I am to steal the bag while you draw the enemy off?"

"Would you object to doing it?"

"It hardly seems consistent with my relationship toward the colonel's niece, and yet if, as you say, he is such a desperate man and engaged in such a tremendous plot against the peace of the people, why I suppose I could enter into a game like that without losing my self-respect."

"Why, I don't see how it should affect your honor, man. I am an officer of the law, and as such I call upon you for assistance. A marshal or sheriff can compel all citizens to assist him in arresting a man. I call upon you to be my deputy; do you understand?"

"And as I can't well resist I'll have to engage with you, Mr. Smith. You can count on my help. And now be kind enough to give me the full particulars as to what I am expected to do, as I want to make a good job of it."

Jesse James rubbed his hands together as though greatly pleased at the prospect before him.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE PLOT.

The Missouri desperado never laid claim to being anything of a diplomat.

He generally took things as they came, and made the most of them.

When he found what a success he was making of this business—apparently—no wonder he was profoundly pleased.

A new field seemed to open up before him; undreamed of possibilities were spread out before him.

He had usually done the planning for his gang when a bank or an express car was to be robbed.

The history of these events proves the truth of the assertions that open this chapter.

They were simply planned.

Much of their success came from the boldness with which they were carried out, and the fact that his men obeyed orders to the letter.

This is often the true secret of success.

Jesse James had now branched out into quite another line.

He was to be a schemer.

Already what had been attempted proved that he gave promise of great success in this line.

He was himself pleased.

The fact of his rubbing his hands together proved this conclusively.

Jack desired to be instructed as to what part he was expected to play.

Already he had received a skeleton-like outline of the game.

He wanted particulars.

These Jesse James now supplied.

"You will have nothing to do with the first part of the business. Leave that to me."

"The duel you mean?"

"Yes."

"Well, suppose you arrange it. The captain will stop the boat so that the affair can come off on some island, or better still, at a wood landing."

"Yes."

"Such an affair will create some excitement, and most of the passengers no doubt can be counted on to leave the boat."

"The field is open to you."

"All that is necessary for you to do is to open that door between, secure the red bag and see that it falls into my hands."

"Ah! but the door."

"What of it?"

"How am I to open it?"

Something cold touched Jack's hand.

A pair of skeleton keys.

"Can I use them?"

"I give you credit for being a smart man, Jack, and any one with half a mind can open that door."

"Yes."

"But I want to warn you about one thing, however."

"What's that?"

"Don't forget to lock the door after you come out."

"I will not."

"I've got a bag in my valise which is an exact duplicate of the colonel's. Get it and leave it in place of the one you take away."

"I can do better than that, perhaps."

"How so?"

"What if, when a search is made, the empty bag is found in the captain's cabin?"

"That would be very good, indeed. I owe him one for the way he spoke to me. But don't take any unnecessary risks about it."

"I will not."

"Unless you see your way clear, better have the bag in place of the full one; and unfasten the catch of the shutter."

"I see—I see!"

"That will take suspicion away from you, and make them believe some outsider has entered to take the money from the bag."

"What is the idea of leaving the empty one?"

"Just this. It will hold off inquiry. Seeing what he

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believes to be his bag there, intact, the colonel may not open it for some time. Thus it gives me all the chance I want to—well, to make further arrangements looking toward the breaking up of this gang."

Of course Jack comprehended.

He knew what the other really meant—that it would give him a better chance to make good his escape with the booty.

Several points were still muddy.

"Let us suppose, then, John Smith, that the affair has been successful so far as I am concerned—the genuine bag has been secured, the bogus one put in its place.

"On your part, you have exchanged fire with the colonel, and satisfaction is admitted as between honorable gentlemen.

"Now, how am I to get the spoils of the game into your hands, and what will be your course?"

"Easy enough. After the duel I will return to the boat, and you will let me have my valise. I shall pretend to leave the boat—in reality it is only to secrete the red bag where it can be found again when evidence is needed against these men."

"Ah! very sharp of you!"

"Then, once more on the boat, I can plan to have the colonel placed under arrest the moment we arrive at our destination."

"And if he finds out his loss before?"

"There will be a great fuss made, but no trace of the money can be found on the boat."

"He might take the alarm."

"I don't think so. At any rate, I shall be on board to watch him. Make up your mind, he'll never escape my eye."

"I believe you."

"Well, I'm a little befogged over one fact. How are you going to fix his revolver so that there will be no danger of him hitting you? The colonel is a dead shot, you remember."

"He will fire, but there will be no bullet in his weapon—it is already doctored."

"Who did it?"

"Ferdinand."

"What! his nephew?"

"Yes."

"But he is not in with you."

"He did it for his own protection, fearing lest his uncle might endeavor to shoot him, or else commit suicide upon realizing his great loss."

"I begin to understand. But, see here—another little thought has come to me."

"Out with it."

"The chances are ten to one Ferdinand will be his uncle's second in the duel."

"That is dead certain."

"He knows the colonel's revolver is harmless, and what more natural than that he should seek to change it or slip in some bullets?"

"I have thought of that. A few words from me will open Ferdinand's eyes to the power I hold over him. Afterward, he will not dare to call his soul his own. Depend upon it, there will be no bullets in the weapon when Colonel Randolph stands up to give and receive fire."

"You are a wonderful man, John Smith."

Jack meant this, for he could not but admire the way in which the plot was conceived.

Jesse James chuckled at the compliment.

"Thanks, Jack. I know my business, I reckon. And I'm bound to break up this terrible gang that holds the Mississippi valley by the throat."

"You'll do it, John, you'll do it. I'm ready to bet on you. And when the old colonel is in the toils there's a clear field between Edith and myself."

"Which you will hasten to improve."

"Yes, yes. You can make sure that Edith will be my wife the hour she comes of age."

"I admire your style, young man. In love as in war, the sudden assault is the successful move, carrying all before it."

"When will you set to work."

"Without delay. Come, keep your eyes open and you will see how neatly I manage it."

All was now told.

Boiled down, the plan was simple enough.

It had no knotty excrescences to mar its beauty, but was plain A, B, C.

When he had spoken the last words, Jesse James left the young planter.

Jack looked around for Paul.

After a while, he found him.

"On deck as usual, Mr. Smith."

It took but a very short time to place the affair in the hands of the detective, and he declared himself satisfied.

Everything was working harmoniously, and unless some accident intervened, they would have it all their own way.

A little game still went on.

Enough interest centered in it to keep a dozen men around, and they were occasionally aroused to a degree of enthusiasm when a player of more than ordinary brilliancy scored a point, and raked in the pot.

The gamblers grew a little more reckless, too.

Occasional visits to the little barroom at one side of the cabin may have had something to do with this part of the business.

An artificial courage, more in the line of reckless daring, can be produced by liquor.

Of course it oozes away gradually, and leaves the man in a worse state than before.

Colonel Randolph stood with the others.

He looked morose.

Truth to tell he felt ugly.

He had just had aroused within him the long-slumbering demon of play, and was entering into the game with heart and soul, when it was broken up by the withdrawal of the judge.

Nor could his importunities induce the old gamblers to let him into the game.

The only excuse that could be given was that the colonel played too heavy a hand for any others present.

The colonel knew he owed his being shut out to this man, for he had seen him talking with the judge at the moment the game was broken up.

Hence, he bore anything but kindly feelings toward this unknown party.

A match was all they needed to set the magazine off, and that could be easily supplied; indeed, Jesse James was ready to strike it.

## CHAPTER VI.

## THE DUEL AT JACKSON'S FERRY.

The time came.

When Jack saw the man who pretended to be a detective move in the direction of Colonel Randolph, he knew trouble was at hand.

Perhaps the scene would be even more desperate in its nature than he had expected.

What if blood should flow in the cabin?

He was sorry at the last moment that some other plan could not have been brought into play, whereby the same end might have been reached.

It was too late now.

The time had arrived when action was to be taken.

Very simple, indeed, was the plan adopted by the Missouri outlaw.

He pushed his way close behind the colonel and, as was natural, the latter, who had been bending forward to see a play in recovering his equilibrium again stepped on the other's foot, purposely thrust forward for this purpose.

"Confusion take you! that was my favorite corn," half howled the man.

The colonel was a gentleman.

He whirled around with the idea of apologizing for what he had done.

When he saw who it was he was stricken dumb, for of all the men on board it galled him to have to say anything in the shape of an apology to this particular individual.

Probably had he been given time he would even have done so.

It was not the intention of Jesse James to allow such a thing to happen.

His opportunity had arrived, and he meant to improve it.

"Why don't you apologize, you old sinner? Don't you know you stepped on my foot? That's offense enough to bring about a rupture even between friends. Men have died for less, sir."

"Indeed," said the colonel, growing angry himself at the offensive tone of the other.

"Do you mean to apologize, sir, or not?"

"I did mean to, but that has passed. You can take the action as an implied insult or not, as you please."

The game was stopped.

Every man was on his feet now.

An affair of this kind meant serious consequences on a Southern boat.

"Then I'll have satisfaction, sir."

"You can, fellow."

"Here in the presence of these gentlemen you have publicly insulted me."

"Well?"

"In their presence you shall atone for it."

"I simply refuse to apologize to a fool."

"Then I shall return the insult."

Quick as a flash Jesse James had sprung forward and brought his open palm against the cheek of the veteran.

The blow was distinctly heard all through the boat's cabin, and men knew it must be followed by a stirring scene.

When first struck the colonel stood there, one side of his face white, the other, where he had been slapped, showing fiery red.

Then, uttering a fierce imprecation, he endeavored to leap at his enemy.

Jesse James stood there calmly awaiting him, but hands were laid upon the colonel, and he was held back.

"Let me go; let me get at him. I'll teach the hound to strike a Southern gentleman. Release me, you cowards; why hold me back?" cried the old man, struggling to get free.

"You're an older man than he is, colonel," said one person in his ear.

"And I cannot allow a brawl on board my boat, gentlemen," remarked the captain; "you will have to settle your differences on shore."

"Settle them; yes, I am ready, eager. Will you meet me, you hound, with a revolver?"

"When?" asked Jesse James, calmly, although he must have been greatly pleased to think how the game was running into his hands.

"Anytime we stop; at the next wood yard," said the colonel, eagerly, straining to get free from the arms that held him in check.

"I agree to stand ten paces away and empty a revolver with you. Whether dead, or wounded, or unhurt that to end the affair."

The colonel laughed grimly.

"Very good. We'll consider that settled, and you may be sure both of us will not leave the spot alive."

"We shall see; I am no poor shot even if I have to fight by torch light," responded the other.

"Captain!"

"Here, Colonel Randolph."

"When do you make your next landing?"

"About an hour from now."

"Where is it?"

"Only our regular stopping place for wood; a small landing known as Jackson's Ferry."

"How long will you remain there?"

"About three-quarters of an hour, as we must take on enough wood to see us through."

"Ample time, sir. Have you a spade on board?"

"A spade? I expect we could find one, colonel. But what in the deuce do you want with it?"

"To dig this man's grave."

Jesse James laughed.

"I reckon they better measure you for it colonel," he said with perfect *sang-froid*.

Evidently the words of the colonel had not made the impression expected.

He sauntered away.

The passengers were excited.

A duel!

Many of them had never witnessed such an affair in their lives.

The peculiar circumstances attending the case added piquancy to it.

A duel by torchlight might be set down as something heretofore unheard of.

The conversation became wholly of the coming event, and each side seemed to have its advocates, one claiming that the colonel was right and the other that he should have apologized immediately after treading on the toes of the stranger.

There seemed to be but one question, however, as to how the affair would end.

The colonel had a reputation as a duelist.

He was a remarkably fine shot.

At such a short distance, even under torchlight, he felt sure he could bring down his man at the first shot, and hit him where he pleased.

The colonel had recovered his temper and kept it bottled up from this time forward.

He appeared as cool as a cucumber.

When the time came to shoot he would be on deck.

Jack had been an interested spectator of this strange scene.

He saw how Jesse James succeeded just as he had expected to; the challenge was given by the colonel, and the condition fixed by the challenged man according to his rights.

What would follow?

The duel must be a dramatic affair, and Jack was only sorry that he and Paul Smith could not witness it in company.

The detective knew his business, however, and would manage things in the right way.

The *Arkansas* was speeding down the river, and, aided by the swift current, must soon reach the landing where her regular supply of wood was to be taken on board.

When this point was reached, the little affair of honor between Colonel Randolph and the unknown could be settled.

Jack watched the parties interested as well as he was able.

The colonel naturally came in for a good share of his attention.

Would he examine his revolver?

Such action would betray the fact that it did not have a bullet in the chambers.

It must tell him his weapon had been tampered with by some magic power, and he would make haste to remedy the lacking quality.

To all appearances, however, the colonel never once bothered his head about this matter.

He was so accustomed to depending on his weapon for self-defense that he relied upon its being in the right condition for business.

This helped the plans of Jesse James along.

The colonel did not retire.

He stood talking with his friends, as cool as a man might be who was going through some pleasant ceremony, or one in which he took little interest because it had grown old.

Thus he showed his contempt for his enemy.

As for Jesse James, he sauntered about in a careless manner, showing no signs of alarm.

When the time came for the exchange of shots, it would be found that his hand was just as steady as a rock.

Perhaps the consciousness that the colonel's revolver

contained no bullets went toward making him so careless; but it was his nature, anyhow.

Thus the time passed.

The steamboat drew near Jackson's Ferry.

She gave a series of whistles as a signal, and a lighted lantern waved from the shore told them that the men at the wood yard were watching.

Quite a little manœuvring was necessary in order to get in close enough; but finally the bow of the steamboat sunk into the bank.

The hawser was made fast.

"Over with you," yelled the mate.

In a moment the black deckhands were running over the gang plank in a line.

They came back with good armfuls of the fuel, which was cut about four feet long.

Just as at Crump's Landing the same monotonous tune was started up, and each darky joined in the chorus, making it lively enough.

No one waited to see it long.

Stepping ashore in a body the dozen passengers took charge of the affair.

Torches were secured.

Then the ground was marked off, not fifty feet away from where the negroes were working.

Of course the darkies knew something was in the wind, but the mate of the steamboat kept every man at his post.

His voice could be heard a quarter of a mile away, directing this man to step lively, swearing at another for getting in the way of those laden down, calling on a certain black fellow not to waste time picking out the smallest timber, and keeping time to their prancing with his cries.

The mate of a Mississippi steamboat is an institution in himself.

On one occasion, when the mate was induced to stop swearing, the crew refused to work. It was like a funeral without his voice.

What he says they pay little attention to, but from habit they are accustomed to the sound of his roaring voice, and to work without it is like troops in review marching without a band.

So, to the music of the mate's tuneful voice the little party of passengers walked back in the woods a short distance.

They came to a clearing.

"Here's the place," said one.

"Are you satisfied, gentlemen?"

"Anything satisfies me. Have you brought the spade along this gentleman desired?"

Jesse James asked the question soberly.

"It is here," replied one of the spectators.

"Arrange the ground, please."

"This could soon be done."

The ten paces were marked off.

Then the men who held the torches formed on either side.

All were eager to see the finish of this most singular affair.

"It's simply suicide," said one man to another.

"I don't see how it could be called anything else, at such a short distance. One shot may miss, but when a

dozen have been fired in all—ugh! We'll bury both of these duelists!"

Nearly all of them thought this same way, although they may not have expressed themselves.

If men would be rash enough to call one another names, and challenge to mortal combat, they must take the consequences.

Paul Smith was on hand.

He desired to see all that was taking place, and owned up to considerable curiosity in the game.

This sort of thing did not happen every day, and when it did come about, it was worth while making a note of it.

Of course he knew or believed there would be no blood spilled.

This took away the tragic nature of the case, but at the same time enabled him to enjoy it all the more.

He did not delight in scenes of carnage, although once a brave soldier himself.

It amused him to watch the face of Jesse James, and note the various expressions that flitted athwart it.

He could see almost every one but that of fear. That was missing.

It knew no place in the man's composition, and all who ever had dealings with him in times gone by would readily agree to that.

He calmly awaited the turn of events.

When the ground was measured off, the two men were placed.

Ten paces apart, they faced each other.

It was only the space of a decent room.

The blazing flambeaux held aloft by the dozen spectators cast a weird glare upon the scene.

It looked uncanny.

Jesse James held his arm at his side, and the hand grasped his revolver.

The colonel seemed a trifle more eager.

He meant to wipe out the insult he had received with his opponent's blood.

At any rate, his intentions were good.

The gentleman who had assumed charge of the affair now called for silence.

"Gentlemen, you both understand the conditions of this affair. When I give the word, commence firing, and keep it up until weapons are empty or else the end comes. Are you ready?"

Both answered in the affirmative, and following his adversary's lead, Jesse James raised his revolver, and covered the colonel's heart.

## CHAPTER VII.

### TWELVE STRANGE SHOTS.

They now simply waited for the word.

It was a tableau never to be forgotten by those fortunate enough to see it.

Colonel Randolph realized that he had been trapped into an affair such as he had never seen the equal of.

It seemed like murder.

Surely neither man could come out of it alive; that was positive.

To his credit, however, be it said, the old duellist never flinched an iota.

He was true grit.

If fate had decided that he should meet his end in this way, so be it.

The colonel was something of a fatalist in his belief, and with him what was to be must come to pass, nor could it be prevented.

Against such an arrangement the puny efforts of man avail little.

He was puzzled at the strange and fierce desire of his opponent to bring about such a deadly affair.

So far as he could remember he had never seen the man before.

Hence, he could not have injured him in the past; such a thought had come to him, only to be as speedily banished.

Another idea flashed into the colonel's brain.

He remembered his word.

Perhaps this strange affair had something to do with Edith.

Was this man her lover?

Did he hope to remove opposition to his winning the young girl by such a course?

It was a false idea.

While thus endeavoring to smooth his path the chances were ten to one he would find himself taken out of the way also.

Men had stood up before the colonel before now, and rued the day they ever challenged him.

He was grimly determined to shoot home.

It would be time enough to learn the fellow's secret after he had downed him.

This explained why he stood there like a rock, ready for the word.

Paul Smith saw all this.

He felt a genuine admiration for the old man.

His bravery stood unquestioned, for he believed that when the word was given, a storm of bullets would be sent at him on death's errand.

As for the other, the case was different.

He knew the colonel's revolver held no bullets, and that there was absolutely no danger for him.

Still, Paul Smith was well enough acquainted with the man's terrible past to believe that he would have stood there just the same under other circumstances.

He was no coward.

Cruel he had shown himself to be. This constant state of being hunted had made him merciless, too; but seldom, if ever, was he called a poltroon.

The man in charge of the torchlight duel, seeing that both parties were ready, gave one last glance around upon the scene.

Then he stepped back, so as to be out of range, for the bullets must shortly fly.

"Again, ready, gentlemen?"

No response came.

The duelists stood there calmly awaiting the signal that might mean death.

"Commence firing!"

No sooner had he spoken these words quickly than a shot was heard.

Colonel Randolph had swung his arm upward into position with the movement of a pendulum.

It was his revolver that blazed out first with a spiteful little flash.

Jesse James was more deliberate, knowing the true state of affairs so well.

Although Randolph had fired point blank at the heart of his adversary, he was astonished not to see any result ensue.

Without stopping to wonder how it was he had made a miss, he kept pumping out shots.

The other had also started to work.

A bullet whistled passed the colonel's ear.

Then a second cut a leaf off just above his head.

It seemed like hot work.

The revolvers kept up a continual rattle for the space of nearly half a minute.

Those who looked on expected to see one or both of the duelists drop.

They were almost sure that this must come to pass.

While the exchange of shots was taking place, they fairly held their breath, such was the intense interest they had in the game.

All was over.

Six shots had been fired on either side.

Still the two men stood there, each holding a smoking revolver in his hand.

The spectators were astounded.

Could it be possible that they had passed through this hot fire unscathed?

The colonel could hardly believe his senses.

He had heard the bullets whistling about his head in a manner that brought back old war scenes.

This convinced him of one thing.

The revolvers must have been well loaded, for he had no suspicion but that the same thing had happened to his opponent.

Then why was there no result?

Could the weird light thrown upon the scene by the torches have blinded them both so that their shots went wide of the mark?

This seemed to be the only plausible explanation of the strange event.

It was a remarkable affair.

Their honor was cleared at any rate.

Colonel Randolph stood there, but his opponent walked up to him.

"Colonel, are you satisfied?"

"Are you, sir?"

His manner implied that he only needed encouragement to load up again and try it over.

"Perfectly."

"Then I suppose that ends it, we have carried out the exact terms of our contract; but I shall always wonder how I could ever have missed putting a bullet in your heart."

Perhaps he was a little suspicious.

"It must have been the peculiar light, colonel," suggested some one.

The colonel snorted in disdain.

Taking a visiting card from his pocket, he stepped over and pinned it to a tree about the same distance away as his opponent had stood.

Then he replaced the empty shells in his revolver with loaded cartridges taken from his pocket.

"We'll soon test that theory."

The revolver blazed forth.

"Dead centre!" called out a man.

Another shot.

"Chipped the card."

A third report.

"Close to the centre."

"Enough, gentlemen. It will always be a mystery to me how I missed a man at that distance, not even winging him out of six shots," said the colonel, scowling at his late opponent.

Jesse James laughed.

He could meet the emergency.

The game was apparently going his way.

"It makes quite a difference, colonel, whether you are firing at a mark or a man. Look at my own experience. I missed you clean. Fasten up another card on the tree beyond the one yours is attached to."

Drawing another revolver, Jesse James fired three shots in rapid succession.

He hardly seemed to aim at all, and yet, when one of the amazed spectators brought the card up, it was found that every bullet had struck the bit of pasteboard near the centre.

As they expressed their astonishment Jesse James chuckled audibly.

"It only goes to show that the best of us will become rattled under certain circumstances. We can both depend on our shooting when a mark receives attention, but when facing each other the result is entirely different."

No one could dispute this point.

Colonel Randolph, however, shook his head as though the matter remained far from being clear to his mind.

He could not get it through his head how he had met with such poor success.

The truth did not strike him, but he imagined his adversary must wear some protecting garment, such as a shirt of mail.

That might in a measure account for the singular phenomenon, though it must ever be a mystery.

The duel was over.

Satisfaction had been given, and each man's honor was cleared.

No one could call either a coward after this.

The colonel sought no means of continuing the affair, but at the same time he would not accept the other's hand, nor look upon him in the light of a friend.

It was evident that the affair burned deeper in his heart than he would have been willing to have admitted.

They walked back to the landing.

The fusillade had been heard by the negroes, and suspecting the truth, they would have rushed to the scene in a body only for the mate, who kept them at their work.

When the party came in sight, all eyes were eagerly turned upon them.

Of course, those who were ignorant of the facts of the case could not tell whether any one had been left on the ground or not.

The captain showed surprise at sight of both men, alive, and apparently untouched.

He had made sure that his passenger list was to be decreased by two.

One of the spectators started to give him the particulars of the strange affair.

He listened eagerly.

When, in conclusion, he heard how each man had made such remarkable shots at a visiting card after the affair, he was just as badly rattled as any of them to account for the truth.

"Perhaps there were no bullets in the weapons," he suggested.

"Ah! you wouldn't say that if you had stood in the place I occupied. I heard them whistle past, and saw a leaf cut off above the colonel's head," returned the passenger, who had happened to be the closest to Randolph during the strange duel.

"Then I give it up—a really remarkable affair. Indeed, I wish all such could come out as bloodless. I don't fancy this duello," said the steamboat captain.

"Are we nearly ready to start?"

"In about five minutes or so."

The mate was hurrying up the deckhands, and nearly all of the wood had been placed on board.

Many hands made light work.

The passengers, gathered in a group, were discussing the scene upon which they had so recently gazed.

It would form a theme for speculation for a long time to come.

Who had ever seen the like?

The blazing torches, the Spanish moss hanging from the trees in festoons, the two men standing face to face and firing rapidly—all these things had been stamped upon their memory indelibly, and they would often in the future speak of the event as the most singular in all their experience.

The colonel, upon reaching the steamboat, called his nephew to him.

"Ferdinand, you examined my revolver?"

The young man seemed to nerve himself for an ordeal.

"I did," he replied.

"Was it in good condition?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then I am more amazed than ever. Really, I must be growing old. Miss a man at ten paces, and with six shots! Heavens! I could have sworn to have downed him in the dark."

The colonel shook his head.

He began to fear that age was creeping upon him hand over hand, and that his dueling days had better be numbered with the past.

As for Ferdinand, he had lied.

He knew the revolver had no bullets in it, but dared not breathe this fact to a living soul, for Jesse James had taken the liberty of whispering a few words in his ear.

Whatever they were, they had a magical effect, and Ferdinand held his peace.

Perhaps he did not fully understand the affair, and may have expected to see his uncle drop in the duel.

This would have served his ends in one way, for the colonel was more trouble to him than he would have dared to admit.

When the duel ended, and no one was hurt, Ferdinand was still more greatly puzzled, but he had received his cue.

It would have cost him his life to have betrayed the secret.

"All aboard."

The wood had been taken in, and they could now proceed on their way.

Excitement had run high, but it was all over now, and for the remainder of the trip the passengers would have plenty to talk about.

After such a scene they could play no more.

It would seem too tame.

The duel had taken place just before midnight, and when the *Arkansas* had backed out of her berth she was soon steaming down the current of the mighty Mississippi.

A shadow of a once glorious moon peeped in view over the eastern shore.

It looked like a ghost at a feast, and came up so slowly that one could easily believe fair Luna was ashamed to be caught in such a fix.

The effect, however, was superb.

Across the swirling water the pale gleam of soft moonbeams fell, making a silvery road.

An up-river steamboat passed through this broad lane of light, and looked like a phantom boat.

Her deep-throated whistle was answered from the *Arkansas*, and then each faded from view.

A light fog seemed to come with the rising of the overripe moon, and an hour after leaving Jackson's Ferry the boat bound for New Orleans found herself walled in by a sea of vapor which obscured all vision.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### WELL DONE.

How about Jack?

He had been left to carry out a very important part of the game.

We have yet to learn how he succeeded.

The little conversation he had secured with Paul Smith before the party left the boat had placed him in possession of certain facts, and given him a good working hand.

He knew what he was expected to do on one hand, and what he meant to do on the other.

He watched the passengers go ashore with something like keen regret.

So far as he could see, he was the only one awake left on board.

Jack would have given something for the privilege of witnessing the duel.

That it was fated to be a strange one he already strongly suspected.

What he knew about it proved that.

Still, by the stern decrees of fate and duty he was debarred the privilege of looking upon it.

Never mind.

If successful in his own line, it would be all right; the grand end to be reached must come the closer on account of his work.

When the men with their blazing flambeaux had vanished from view under the trees, he gave one glance at the line of darkies stretching from the boat to the great wood pile.

Then he settled down to his work.

Passing at once to his stateroom, he locked the door.

Taking the skeleton keys handed over by Jesse James, he tried to open the connecting door.

Being an amateur at the art, his first few attempts were failures.

Instead of giving up he only worked the harder.

A sharp turn of the wrist and he had twisted the key in the lock.

Nothing now prevented him from opening the door passing through.

Of course, Jack Anderson had a peculiar sensation while thus forcing an entrance to the stateroom of another person.

He seemed to be for the time being a burglar, and his feeling was one of repugnance.

Then he remembered that he was working in the interest of justice.

The man whom he meant to hoodwink and outwit was a notorious rogue.

He must be beaten at his own game, no matter what means were employed.

Paul Smith knew what he was about, and from this individual Jack had his orders.

As soon as he had opened the door he stepped into the adjoining room.

It was empty.

Both Ferdinand and his uncle had to be at the scene of the encounter, one because he was a chosen second, and the other on account of being a principal.

A lamp burned feebly.

Jack needed more light.

He turned the lamp up a little.

Then he looked for the red bag.

To his surprise, he failed to discover it under the head of the bunk.

Surely, it had been there before.

Had the colonel removed it?

Jack remembered that the ex-soldier had been in the stateroom several times since their visit just above Crump's Landing.

It certainly looked as though Randolph must have done something with the bag.

Jack would have known it had the other carried the missing bag away.

From the fact that he had seen nothing of it, he judged that the article must be stored somewhere within the stateroom.

Without delay he set to work looking for it.

This sort of work soon brought its reward, for he discovered the lost bag hidden away under the tossed-up blanket of the upper bunk.

In a moment he had it upon the floor.

The key belonging to his red bag fitted this one, and when the lock was manipulated, open fell the long-cherished *vade mecum* of the colonel, which had traveled many thousands of miles as his inseparable companion.

This action exposed the money.

It was tied up in packages.

Jack's heart almost stood still with dread when his hands first fell upon this.

It seemed to him as though he were in the act of committing a crime.

He had to shut his teeth hard together, and summon all his resolution to his aid, before he could accomplish what he meant to do.

Then he lifted the money out, tied a string around all the packages, and laid the bundle aside.

The red bag he closed, locked and returned to its original position.

Thus far all had gone well.

He was not yet safe.

What if some one came in and caught him in the act? Could he ever explain away the ignominy that must attach to his action?

No wonder Jack was nervous.

Having now accomplished all that had taken him to the stateroom of the colonel, he once more passed back to his own.

No alarm had come.

He felt thankful.

Again the door was closed and locked.

What next?

At his feet lay the red bag given him by the Missouri train robber; also the valise into which it so neatly fitted.

Should he place the money in this?

To do so would be very pleasant to Jesse James, no doubt, but it would ruin the game being played by Paul Smith.

Jack had no such intention.

He knew his duty.

Carefully he made a package just the size of the bundle of bills.

On the top and on the bottom he placed a bill taken from his own pocket.

Then the whole was wrapped up in a newspaper and securely tied with a heavy cord.

After this had been done a little of the paper was torn at either end, to show the bank bills.

Taken in all, the package was about as deceptive in appearance as one could imagine.

If picked up on the street it would have set the lucky finder's heart to fluttering with mad anticipation and excitement.

Just as he put the finishing touches to this package, there was heard the quick percussion of shots near by.

They could not be counted, because some blended with others, but while Jack listened he was sure that a dozen shots had been fired.

"That ends the great duel," he muttered.

The package was placed in the red bag, and this in turn dropped within the jaws of the valise provided for its accommodation.

Jack smiled.

He knew his part of the game had been well played thus far.

What would it end in?

Paul Smith knew what he was about, and he had guaranteed success.

Soon they would be returning, and he must finish his part of the programme without delay.

What did these shots mean?

Hark! They were followed by many more.

Could a second duel have succeeded the first?

Perhaps the passengers had taken sides and were having it out on that line.

If so, their work was apt to prove more bloody than that of the principals, for they held no empty revolvers or weapons loaded with blank cartridges.

Jack passed out into the cabin.  
Not a soul was in sight.

Below could be heard the tuneful voice of the mate swearing at his hands, and the steady noise as the billets of wood descended.

That was all.

Jack thrust the brown valise in the corner where he had been directed to leave it.

Then he passed outside.

Paul was among the returned spectators.

He came directly to the spot where Jack awaited him, according to previous arrangement.

When he sighted the young planter he laughed in his own quiet way.

Jack told the detective of his success.

Paul rubbed his hands together.

He seemed immensely pleased.

"And the money, Jack?"

"Here you are."

The detective received the package.

"Jove! quite a little wad of it, eh?"

"Too much to fall into the hands of a freebooter like Jesse James," replied Jack.

Paul secreted the money.

"I'll see that it falls into the proper hands," he remarked, quietly.

"How about the duel?"

Jack was naturally anxious to hear all about this singular affair.

Before answering, the detective was obliged to give free play to his feelings in a laugh that seemed to come up from his boots.

"It was the most astonishing sight that ever fell to my lot," he declared.

Then, in response to the entreaties of his young friend, he briefly narrated what had occurred.

To all of which Jack listened eagerly.

When the story was done he felt constrained to laugh also.

It did seem ridiculous; the idea of two men blazing away at each other six times, at only ten paces, and not bringing a scratch.

To those who were not in the secret, the affair must seem even more strange.

"I would have given something to have seen that duel, Paul."

"I'm sorry you did not; but at the same time you've done a good service by remaining on board—one that our friend will appreciate I'm sure, when he glances at that package."

"You mean Jesse James?"

"Yes."

"I'm only fearful that he may investigate too far, and discover the fraud."

"There is a chance of that, I admit, but only one in ten."

"You mean to hand this money over to Colonel Randolph soon?"

"To-night."

"And will you tell him about my part in it?"

"He shall know all."

"I wonder how he will take it?"

Paul gave a grunt.

"He's a fool if he doesn't think the world of you after what you've done."

"Then you believe he will look at it in that light?" asked Jack, eagerly.

A vision of beauty came before him.

Edith!

If he gained the favor of the colonel, all opposition to their union vanished.

"In about half an hour or so I will join you here and we will talk it over again."

"Good."

The detective slipped away.

Undoubtedly his design was to have an interview with the colonel.

Jack remained there, looking out on the moonlight flood.

The steamboat surged onward, the monotonous puff, puff of the steam from the high-pressure pipes, and the whirling of her wheel being the only sounds that could be heard.

From this reverie the young planter was aroused by feeling some one touch his arm.

## CHAPTER IX.

ACCUSED BY JESSE JAMES.

Jack turned.

He had not the least doubt in the world but that he would find himself face to face with Jesse James.

Under these circumstances, he made a great effort to keep his face straight, not meaning to betray himself in that manner.

To his great surprise, it was an entirely different individual who stood there.

The judge!

Jack knew the old gambler to speak to, but that was the furthest their acquaintance went.

He wondered now what the man wanted.

As the moonlight fell upon his face, Jack saw an expression of great cunning there.

"Mr. Anderson, you did not attend the duel?" he said, in his suave way.

"No, sir."

"Object to such scenes?"

"Not particularly."

"Other fish to fry, eh?"

Jack colored, but being in his own shadow, this did not give him away.

"Perhaps."

"You missed a strange sight, sir."

"By the way, judge, if I remember correctly, you were not one of those I saw returning."

At this the gambler chuckled.

"I thought of going at first, and then concluded I had better stay away."

"I see."

"Both of the men involved have something of a spite against me, and as bullets were going to fly about promiscuously, I was afraid one of them might think I made a good mark, or having shot his man, conclude to make a complete job of it."

"Judge, your wisdom is astonishing."

"So I concluded to remain on the boat."

"Yes."

"And go to bed."

"What?"

"Retire to my bunk."

Jack stared at him.

A dim suspicion of the truth had flashed into his mind just then.

"You did that?"

"Before they got off."

"You and I have the same room."

"Yes."

"See here, judge, were you in your bunk when I entered a little while ago?"

This was putting it to the touch.

The judge answered promptly:

"I was."

"In the upper berth?"

"Yes."

"Asleep?"

"Partly, at first."

"You watched me?"

The judge laughed.

"I couldn't do otherwise."

"What did you think?"

"That it was the queerest thing I had ever seen a young gentleman like you do."

Jack had recovered.

He was himself once more and equal to the emergency.

"That happened because you were not in the game. See here, judge, you are a gambler by profession, but you've never been in with thieves."

"Never, sir."

"There is one man aboard this boat, however, the prince of robbers, who seems to have some sort of a hold over you."

"Confusion! You know this?"

"That man is Jesse James."

The judge's countenance was a study.

He seemed alarmed.

"How do you know this?" he stammered.

Already the tables had turned, and it was Jack who turned the thumb-screws.

"Never mind; I know all about it, even to the fact that the duel was to be a bloodless one, because the cartridges in the colonel's revolver were blanks."

"You don't say?"

"Now, you must understand, judge, that I am working the detective business. What you saw me do was only a portion of a scheme arranged between my partner and myself to deceive Jesse James. He is after the colonel's money, as you may have already suspected."

"Go on."

"You are interested?"

"Decidedly so."

"You hate that man yourself?"

"I do, indeed!"

"Then I need not fear your betraying me. It would be poor policy on your part, and certain to get you into trouble, because we already know you were in a plot with Ferdinand to clean the colonel out."

"Only in a legitimate way, Mr. Anderson," hastily declared the gambler; "I rob no man."

"That is how you chance to look at it. At any rate,

as you have, by a strange chance, seen part of my actions, I mean to trust you that far."

"Was that the detective who just left you?"

Jack hesitated.

"Yes," he finally admitted.

"Is his name Paul Smith?"

"You know him?"

"I thought I recognized him. So he is on the track of Jesse James? The man is in danger when such a sharp officer follows the trail. I rather reckon Jesse will go back in irons."

"I hardly believe so."

"Eh?"

"Because Paul declares his mission is not to arrest the outlaw."

"Then why does he follow him?"

"I don't know. It has something to do with a secret between them. That is his affair, not mine. Just at present our business is to thwart his plans regarding the colonel's money."

At this the gambler laughed.

"Well, young man, if what I saw was any criterion from which to judge, I reckon you are in a fair way to realize your ambition."

"The money is even now on its way to the colonel, and the bogus package you saw me make up has, no doubt, fallen into the outlaw's hands."

"When does the final round-up take place?"

"Excuse me, but I do not know, nor would I feel as though I was doing the right thing to tell you, even if I did. Paul Smith will shape his own plans, and bring success."

"Well, I'm glad I spoke about it. I was mighty curious to know what it all meant. I wonder my eyes didn't pop out watching you."

"The greatest wonder to me is that I failed to see you at all. I must have been greatly engrossed in my work."

"You were, indeed, and in a hurry, too. Now, Mr. Anderson, you needn't be afraid that I will betray you. There's no interest for me to do it. On the contrary, my side is your side—there's something between that man and me which keeps us always from being friends."

"Very good, judge. Say no more about it, but keep a still tongue, and watch. You may yet see something come about quite as interesting as the singular duel."

"I'll keep my weather eye open, sir. Meanwhile, silence is the word."

With that the judge moved off.

"Next," muttered Jack.

It was as though he were receiving, and visitors stood in line awaiting his pleasure.

Hardly had the gambler faded from view down the hazy deck, than another figure loomed up.

He expected that Jesse James would be along, and glancing at this party as he drew near, recognized the gait of the man from Missouri.

Now there was a part to play.

If the other did not already suspect the trick that had been palmed off on him, he could be easily hoodwinked.

On the contrary, if he had discovered the real contents of the package he held in his bag, trouble rested in the air.

He would soon know the worst.

His revolver was handy in case it came to a termination between this man and himself.

Jack did not hanker after such an engagement, knowing the other's prowess by reputation; but he was a young man who takes things as they come and make the best of them.

He believed that certain signs would tell him what the condition of the other's mind was—the manner of his approach, for instance.

Judging from this then, Jesse James was in an ordinary frame of mind, for he advanced to Jack's side, quietly.

There was no precipitate haste, as though eager for revenge might be the predominant thought.

"That you, Jack?"

"Yes."

"I thought I would find you here."

"Your duel came all right, I understand."

"Then you've heard about it?"

"From a gentleman who saw all."

"Was it the judge?"

"Why do you ask that?"

"Didn't he just leave you?"

"Yes."

"I failed to notice him among the spectators."

"Nor was he there. It was another party from whom had the facts."

"Then you know the judge?"

"Slightly. I care to have little to do with him; but in a steamboat voyage all passengers have to be more kindly than on shore."

"That's a fact. Did the judge have any particular business with you?"

Why did he harp upon this subject?

Could he suspect?

Jack failed to see how, but it occurred to him that perhaps he had better tell what really brought the ambler to his side.

"Yes—business that concerned both of us."

"Ah, yes, what was it?"

"You found that I had succeeded?"

"You made a magnificent job of it, Jack. Great credit is due you."

"I had no trouble. Thanks to your preparation, everything went off as we expected, and in the course of time I managed to bring order out of chaos. I don't believe the colonel has yet discovered his loss."

"No reason he should," declared the other, Jack ought with rather significant emphasis.

"Unless his suspicions were aroused in some way."

"Yes, unless his suspicions were aroused."

"And he examines into matters beyond a superficial glance, you know."

"Some people have a faculty for that—refusing to believe in outside appearances."

Again that strange thrill shot over Jack's frame at the words of his companion.

Was there a covert threat beneath them?

He could not tell.

Jesse James was an enigma to him.

He seemed to be wearing a mask.

What lay under it?

In order to keep the ball rolling, he started in to

describe the manner in which he had secured the coveted spoils.

When he spoke of the money, he always called it a packet, and thus impressed upon the mind of the other the fact that it was tied up.

"Well, what has all this to do with the judge?" asked Jesse James, finally.

"Everything."

"How is that?"

"The judge declined to go to the duel because he said both of you disliked him, and as bullets were about to fly thickly, one might strike him."

At this the other chuckled.

"I see—the old fellow is as cautious as ever."

"I thought he was very wise."

"Perhaps so."

His tone said "proceed."

"Instead of going to the duel he went to bed."

"Yes."

"You remember we occupy the same stateroom?"

"The deuce you say."

"I never noticed him—he had climbed into the upper berth and lay there all the time I opened the door, and coming back closed it again."

"He must have been highly surprised."

"Yes, and edified too."

"And now he comes to you for explanations?"

"That is it."

"What did you tell him?"

"Pretty much of the truth, knowing that he feared you, and would hardly dare betray you."

"You told him we were after Randolph?"

"Yes, and that he was a counterfeiter—that the net was around him and he could not escape."

"How did he like that?"

"Seemed alarmed."

"With good cause."

"Then he is in the league himself?"

"Yes, the judge has a connection there, and now that he learns the jig is up it will surprise you to see how fast he'll make tracks in order to save his own bacon."

"He swore not to mention the facts I gave him to a living soul."

"And the judge is generally a man of his word. He knows me. I reckon he'll keep quiet."

"You can believe I was considerably astonished when he broke his news to me."

The other laughed harshly.

"I presume so. You're not used to handling such subjects, Mr. Anderson, and yet I declare you give evidence of considerable shrewdness."

"Thanks."

"There is only one thing I must warn you against."

"And that?"

"Playing double with a man—being in partners and yet seeking to beat him out in the game."

This was getting warm.

"Explain, sir."

"For instance, under certain circumstances pretending to do one thing, and in reality accomplishing another."

"Be plainer."

"If you will have it, what possessed you to hide the counterfeit money you found in the colonel's red bag, and place a dummy package in my satchel?"

## CHAPTER X.

## THE SECOND TIME WILL TELL.

The cat was out of the bag.

No longer could he doubt what the actions of this man might mean.

He knew more than Jack had meant should come to his knowledge.

His words about some people who are never satisfied with outside appearances, meant himself in particular.

He had opened the package.

No sooner was this done than the whole thing lay before him.

He could see what a hollow mockery it was, and now he was seeking an explanation.

What should Jack say?

It was indeed fortunate that instead of being confused and all broken up by the sudden disclosure, Jack's thoughts seemed to fly like lightning.

He formed his plan of action instantly.

Upon his face was a look of surprise.

"Say that again, John Smith."

The other repeated his words as well as he could.

"Do you mean that?"

"Yes. Explain yourself."

"I am astonished. Do you mean you opened the package?"

"I did."

"And it contained——"

"A lot of waste paper, with a bill neatly tied on either side. Then the whole thing was tied up in a newspaper wrapping, in which a hole was torn on either end to show the bill and make one believe the whole package consisted of money."

"Confusion!"

"Did you make that package?"

"Yes."

"Ah! I knew it must be so, but had an idea you would deny it."

"Why should I when it was a part of my plan."

"Part of your plan, eh?"

"Yes, and I considered it the best of all, but I must have mixed up the bags."

"How could you do it?"

"I marked one of the bags with a postage stamp."

"A clever idea."

"Very, and then I must have forgotten which one I marked. I thought it was yours, but it begins to look as though it must have been the colonel's."

"Well, about the package?"

"When I saw that the colonel had his money tied up in a package, I thought it would be a splendid idea to leave a dummy with him."

"Then, if he chanced to look in his bag, he would believe everything was secure."

"I made up that packet in a hurry, using two bills from my own pocket to finish it off, and here the whole business has fallen through."

Jack spoke in a tone of disgust.

He seemed to be heartily sick of the whole business, and Jesse James, looking at him as well as he could in the moonlight, could not detect any insincerity in his manner.

His manner was so sincere that it served to convince the other.

Although a good reader of humanity, Jesse James was far from being infallible, and he fell by the wayside now.

He believed Jack meant what he said.

"Nonsense, don't be disheartened over one little slip like that, friend Jack."

Jack brightened up.

To see the look of eager anticipation that came over his face one would think a new hope had been kindled in his breast.

"Then my foolish mistake does not end the game for you?"

The man whose past was filled with varied adventures looked Jack in the face as he said, slowly:

"I never was known to give up a thing while a ray of hope remained."

"I can well believe it, from what I have seen of your character."

"Remember, the next time we are bound to carry the day, and woe to the man who stands between me and that which I covet!"

His manner was tigerish.

Jack again felt that cold chill come over him, as though a lump of ice had dropped down his back.

Would he ever stand before this terrible man as a mortal foe, and shoot from the hip as a means of ending the game?

It was not a pleasant prospect to face.

Then came the thought of Paul Smith, and once more his mind was at ease.

The detective would relieve him from all the danger emanating from such a source.

He bent his energies toward probing the matter, and learning more of the other's plans.

Jesse James was not ready to speak in detail of these as yet.

He agreed to meet Jack an hour later at the same spot, when he would disclose his new plan for gaining possession of the money that thus far had eluded his grasp.

Thus they separated.

Jack waited.

Was his reception over?

It seemed that he must be holding a levee by the way the others flocked to confer with him.

No one else appeared.

The time passed.

He entered the cabin, to find a few of the passengers still lounging about.

Although it was past the hour of midnight, they had not retired.

The reason was obvious.

As the *Arkansas* could only give stateroom accommodations to a certain number, and there was quite a crowd on board, some of the men had been left in the matter of berths.

One or two were wise enough to stretch out on sofas,

d just at present seemed to be enjoying a half-way dream sleep.

Others sat in easy-chairs.

They could doze here if they liked.

Jack sat down.

He was feeling somewhat tired himself, and, had the circumstances been indulgent, would have been glad to tire to his bunk and sleep.

The minutes passed.

Paul Smith did not appear.

Twice Jack saw Jesse James enter the cabin.

The man's manner would indicate that he was engaged in some weighty business.

Whatever he was up to, Jack realized that he had gone into it heart and soul.

There could be no denying this.

Once, seeing the young planter watching him, he nodded his head and smiled.

This was as much as saying that all was well.

Whatever he busied himself about was in a fair way of receiving attention.

The boat was making good time, and there seemed a fair prospect of her reaching the Crescent City within thirty hours.

Such an hour he had never spent.

It seemed drawn out over ten.

Not that he found anything to worry about, but there was much left undone, and he was anxious for the crisis to come.

What had the detective said to Randolph?

Would the colonel be disposed to look more kindly upon him after this?

The thought gave him satisfaction, not because he had my great liking for the ex-soldier, but it was as Edith's guardian he thought of him.

Was she nearer to him?

The young man could not regret his night's work, if it brought him closer to the object which he had set down as the one desire of his life.

It was drawing near the time.

He nerved himself to meet the emergency, and pass over the danger line.

Beyond lay the harbor.

Jack again looked at his watch, and heaved a sigh of great relief.

"The time at last!"

And, rising, he left the cabin.

## CHAPTER XI.

### COLONEL RANDOLPH HEARS NEWS.

When Paul Smith left his confederate it was with the intention of seeking Colonel Randolph.

He had a long story to tell.

No doubt the military man would be tremendously surprised to see what he had passed through, and learn of the danger still threatening him.

It was the detective's idea to work in a good word for Jack whenever he could do so without appearing to do so intentionally.

He looked around for his man.

The colonel had retired to his room.

Ferdinand was in the cabin, and the detective saw that

he undoubtedly meant to remain there for some time to come.

He knew the number of the room the uncle and nephew occupied in common.

It adjoined Jack's.

When he approached it he saw the key in the lock.

This was proof enough of its being occupied.

Most men would have been timid about entering another person's stateroom uninvited, but Paul Smith was not.

He opened the door and stepped in.

A lamp was turned down.

The colonel had removed his shoes and outer clothes and tumbled into the lower berth.

"That you, Ferd?" he muttered, conscious that some one had entered.

"Colonel, it isn't Ferdinand."

At this Randolph rolled around.

"Who the deuce are you, and what d'ye want here?" he demanded, fiercely.

"Colonel, I have sought you to tell you some of the most astonishing things you ever heard."

"Bah! get out and let me sleep."

"They concern your welfare."

"Nonsense."

"I can explain why you failed to pink your man in the recent bloodless duel."

At this the colonel sat upright, his head just touching the berth above.

"Now you're talking. I'm ready to hear that."

The detective had felt sure all along that he could reach the other when he wished.

Such things did not worry him.

There was always a way with him.

"In the first place, colonel, let us prove to you who I am," he said.

"I don't care a cent about that; only tell me what I want to know, and you may be the Old Nick himself for all of me."

"It suits my purpose to prove my identity first, and I refuse to speak until that has been done."

"Oh, very well," carelessly.

Colonel Randolph had begun to realize that he was in contact with a man who had a will of his own.

When he learned that his visitor was a detective, his interest grew apace.

As Paul continued to speak and told of the strange things that happened on board the *Arkansas*, the colonel's eyes opened wider.

There was no trace of sleep in them now.

He had never been more thoroughly awake in all his life.

Paul kept back nothing.

He desired the other to know all that had taken place, even to the dark plan of Ferdinand.

When he came to the point where the identity of his rival in the duel was declared, the colonel received quite a shock.

"Jesse James, you say?" he gasped.

"No other."

"And I have met that notorious man in a duel?"

"That is so, and you might have gone down with a bul-

let in your brain but that he had it all arranged differently."

"Go on with your wonderful story."

"You are following me?"

"To the letter."

"Do you believe all I say?"

"It sounds incredible, but circumstances force me to accept it all."

"Very good."

Paul continued his story.

The colonel's interest did not flag.

There was enough to occupy his attention in the recital. Nor did Paul forget Jack.

The colonel reached back in the berth and drew the small red handbag toward him.

"You see, it seems to be in perfect condition."

"Yes. Open it, colonel."

With a key the other did so.

Then he tumbled the contents out upon the berth, and uttered an exclamation.

"Missing, eh?"

"Ever dollar of it."

"Just as I told you."

The colonel looked anxious.

"I am glad to remember that you said my money was safe," he said.

"Did I state so?"

"You certainly did, man."

"Now, colonel, do you know exactly how much you had in that package?"

"I can show you the figures in a minute. See, here is the original sum; I took out this amount, and it left exactly eleven thousand three hundred."

"Rather a large sum to carry with one."

"Yes, and I was a fool to do it, but ever since I found myself bitten by the failure of the Butter Bank I've hated to hand over my money to a corporation. This teaches me another lesson, though."

"Kindly run over that pile."

With these words, the detective thrust into his hands a package of bills.

Eagerly the colonel wet his fingers and began to count—his face was wreathed in smiles as he finished.

"Right—to the dollar."

"Then see that you don't trust it to the mercies of the red bag again."

"Now, to return to our mutton."

"Meaning ourselves."

"In a way, yes. This man will not give up the case yet."

"Jesse James—well, he has the reputation of being a sticker, and I guess we'll find him in at the death."

"He is after my money. That humbug of a duel was only arranged to take me away."

"So his supposed confederate could secure the money."

"What will you advise?"

"I can only say temporarily, as his plans may soon be completely altered."

"Well, advise me."

"First of all, let us make a second dummy and put it in the bag."

"Good! I catch the idea."

"Can you give me material?"

"I reckon so."

This was soon found, and under the skillful handling of the detective it assumed the proper shape.

He borrowed a couple of bills from the colonel for the two ends.

Then a newspaper was wrapped about it, secured with a stout string.

Paul tore this cover a little, exposing a bill.

"Here, colonel, figure out the contents in plain letters—just as you did before."

Quickly Randolph did so.

"Will that suit?" he asked.

"Yes, indeed. When he sees that he may take it as an endorsement of the contents, just as a bank tellers' figures on a broken package of bills are accepted as exact and to the mark."

"What shall I do with this?"

"Drop it in your bag."

The colonel did so, having previously replaced all of the other articles.

"Now lock it."

"Done."

"Place it where you had it, and be just as solicitous about the safety of the bag as though it contained the money you have secreted in your pocket."

"Thanks, I will do so."

Paul left as he came—quietly.

He had much open business to close up, and could not afford to waste time.

The person who interested him most now was the central figure of the show.

What would Jesse James do?

Perhaps he might learn all through Jack, who would, of course, be in the secret.

He passed out of the cabin without attracting attention from any one.

Presently, some one brushed by him.

It was Jack himself, on the way to keep his appointment at the rendezvous.

At first, the detective was tempted to call out to him, but second thought proved best, and he refrained from doing so.

Instead, he made up his mind to put another plan into practice.

Silently he stole after Jack.

## CHAPTER XII.

### PAUL SMITH PLANS.

"Am I on time, Mr. Anderson?"

Turning, Jack discovered the man whose confederate he was supposed to be—the pretended detective, John Smith.

"Close to it, sir."

"A number of things have delayed me; but now, I am pleased to say, everything seems favorable toward reaching our goal, success."

"I have made arrangements whereby the colonel's bag with its counterfeits will fall into my hands at last."

"Did I tell you before that there were other men on board this boat owing allegiance to me?"

"You gave me to understand so."

"I have united all in a league. Our prime object is to capture the evidence of the colonel's crime."

"I understand it so."

"We men of the law, as you can believe, often find ourselves in a hole, and compelled to use queer means in order to effect our purposes."

"Yes, just so, Mr. Smith."

Every nerve was thrilling with eagerness to hear what man had to say, but he dared not show his feelings in his manner.

"I am afraid that if we put the mate off until we reach New Orleans our man may slip us or else manage to lose the evidence of his crime."

"Under such circumstance it behooves me to work with promptness and dispatch."

"He must be taken into custody before we arrive at the city."

"I understand what you mean. Go on."

"This boat will stop to let me off an hour before day-break. The captain dares not refuse me—he knows who I am."

The significance of those words went straight to Jack's heart. "He knows who I am."

"When we reach a point just above the landing something will occur to cause an alarm."

"One of the men in charge of the engine is with me, and he will cause a valve to blow out, flooding the boat with steam."

"Good Heavens!" cried Jack.

"Coolly, now. It will hurt no one, but great alarm must ensue. This will cause a stampede of passengers ashore as soon as she touches."

"If Colonel Randolph goes without his red bag we are it."

"Should he take it with him, our duty is plainly to arrest him as he steps ashore, and carry him off so that his fellow-passengers may not rescue him if inclined that way."

"Would they do it?"

"They may refuse to recognize me as an officer of the law."

"And this is your plan, Mr. Smith?"

"Yes."

"What part have I in it?"

"You must be ready to enter the stateroom if he rushes out without the bag and secure it."

"No exchange this time?"

"I've done with that."

"About this steam. What does the danger amount to?"

"There is none."

"You assure me of that?"

"I do, emphatically."

"I ask for two reasons. In the first place, I would not like to have a hand in injuring any one on board this boat. Then, again, I do not care to figure as an aerial performer in case the boiler is about to explode."

"Nonsense, Jack. Fear nothing of the kind. I give you my word that it is only an artifice. The only result will be a bad scare."

"Then you count me in."

"If you see the colonel making tracks with his bag,

follow after him. We may need your assistance ashore in making the arrest."

"I understand. When is this thing to occur?"

"Just before landing."

"She will whistle first?"

"Yes, while heading in. When you hear the whistle look out for a racket."

"Who is the man at the engine?"

"There are two, but Bob will be on duty then."

"Bob? What is his other name?"

"Bailey."

"He can be depended on?"

"Yes; he served with me once."

"As a detective?"

"Well—er—no; in the ranks of the guerillas."

"Oh! yes; you were in the war. Well, I'm glad you can recommend him, because it is a position where a traitor might spoil all."

"Don't fear for Bob. I have him under my thumb. Besides, such an accident happens once in a while, even on the best of boats. No one will suspect him."

"It's a queer affair."

"I'm rather proud of it."

"Well, perhaps so; but, do you know, I can't quite get it through my head why you don't arrest the old colonel on the boat."

"I have my reasons, and good ones, too; half a dozen of them. I can't go into detail now. Let me answer that I am compelled to adopt some other plan."

"Under such circumstances, I reckon you have done well to arrange such a schedule."

"You accept the part I marked out for you?"

"Yes."

"Then we'll call it settled."

"Is that all?"

"Until the time comes for the steam bath."

"Ugh! I hardly fancy that part of it. I've read of so many fatalities from inhaling steam."

"This won't be heavy enough to do any damage, but it will make a tremendous racket, and scare every passenger half out of his senses."

"When they rush out and through the steam see that the boat has run into the bank, you mark they'll jump for the shore in short order."

Thus the interview ended.

Brief as it was, it gave the man behind the bulkhead near by a chance to hear all.

"That you, Paul?" whispered Jack.

"Yes."

It was the hidden detective who answered.

"Come here, please."

The detective reached his side.

"Don't bother telling me what was said, Jack."

"You already know it?"

"Yes."

"Hidden near by?"

"Over yonder. The bulkhead against which you leaned hid me from view. It was also an excellent conductor of sound."

"What do you think of his scheme?"

"You mean the steam bath?"

"Yes."

"A great idea, I declare. It rather staggered me at

first, but I soon grew to understand just how such a thing could be done."

"Would it prove a success?"

"It might, only for the presence of P. S. near by."

"Meaning Paul Smith, of course."

"That's it."

"Do you believe there's danger in it?"

"No. We will be near shore when it comes to pass. Even if any fool did jump overboard, they could get to the bank. There will be a scare, of course, but no one need be harmed."

"The deuce!"

"What now?"

"Why, man alive! you talk as though you were about to let the affair go on!"

"I mean to, up to a certain stage."

"The steam-bath, too?"

Paul laughed.

"You seem to be particularly concerned about that part of the business, Jack."

"Well, I am. Do you mean to let them carry it out as they have arranged?"

"Why not?"

"Just as you say, sir. I am not particular about the matter, so long as you say it's right."

"I thought at first I'd step down and see this Bob Bailey, and let him know his part in the game was no secret. Then the affair would be a rather dismal failure."

"Have you changed your mind?"

"Yes."

"And mean to let it go through?"

"It will facilitate matters."

"Very good."

"You are ready to carry out your part?"

"I am."

"When you see Colonel Randolph rush past you he will have a red bag in his hand."

"Yes."

"That means you are to follow him."

"And secure the bag?"

"No; leave that for Jesse James. Keep as close on the heels of the colonel as you can, and be ready to spring to his assistance when he calls on you."

"Then he will know I am near?"

"Yes."

"And on his side?"

"He knows that already."

Something in the tone or manner of the detective caused Jack to become suspicious.

"See here, Mr. Smith, you are keeping a part of your game from me."

"Eh?"

"You mean to do something, and have not told me what it is."

"Speak on."

"Plainly, then, you have made, or intend making, an arrangement with Colonel Randolph to assume his identity."

At this Paul slaps him on the back.

"My dear fellow, you do yourself proud."

"Ah! I have hit the mark?"

"You have. It is my intention to change places with the colonel. Then, with the assistance of my man

and your help, I hope to get Jesse James in a corner."

"Are you a light sleeper?" added Paul Smith.

"Yes—very."

"Lie down ready-dressed, so you can make for shore. Now, I am off, with lots to do."

### CHAPTER XIII.

#### BOB BAILEY GROVELS.

The detective, upon leaving Jack Anderson, made his way to the lower deck.

Here the cargo was piled up, much of it being in the hold, however.

In front were the boilers.

Colored firemen shot great lengths of wood into the gaping jaws opened to receive them.

The rush of the waters could be plainly heard, as the deck was only a few feet above the surface of the great river.

Altogether the scene was a peculiar one when the light flashed out from the open fire-doors and revealed the surroundings.

Paul Smith was well acquainted with all the parts of a river boat, and had no difficulty in making his way about. Here the engine was situated.

A few lamps and a lantern or two gave light.

The great machine kept up a monotonous clink, clink, clank, as each part moved steadily in its allotted channel.

How massive it looked!

Each arm, and pinion, and wheel had an appointed duty to perform, and, working jointly, sent the great steamer whirring on her way.

The detective believed in such united action.

His plans often included several men, but each had his allotted task to perform—united, they stand; divided, they fall.

His quick eye speedily fell upon the man whom he sought.

At the engine, oil can in hand, lubricating some of the intricate parts, stood one of the engineers, a short man, with a check jumper and a pair of overalls.

Paul looked at his face.

It was not a bad one.

Such a man might have fallen into error by some poor fortune, but he would not voluntarily seek out a life of crime.

"No trouble handling him," was the thought that flashed into Paul's mind.

He was in no hurry.

Plenty of time remained.

Presently the engineer got around on his side, and continued his work.

Paul spoke to him pleasantly concerning some of the machinery. The man answered while he worked, and presently they had opened up quite a little chat.

When the other finished his work, he rested his arm on a beam, and stood near him.

Paul had him just where he wanted.

The light fell on his face.

Thus the detective could observe every emotion that flitted across that countenance.

It suited him well.

He desired to watch the man's face, as in that manner he could tell whether he spoke the truth better in any other way.

Suddenly he said:

"Is your name Bob?"

"Yes," replied the other.

"Bob Bailey?"

"That's it," moving a little uneasily.

"Have you ever been ashamed of that name?"

"Sir!"

"I mean just what I say. You were not always an engineer."

"No"

"Once you fought in the war."

"I was a soldier."

"And wore the gray?"

"Yes, sir."

He seemed somewhat alarmed, as though suspecting that his interlocutor might be more than he appeared.

"Were you one of Quantrell's rough riders?"

"Who told you so?"

"I asked you a question, Bob."

"Yes, Quantrell was my leader."

"You knew all his men?"

"Pretty much."

"Then you must have run across the James boys, as they were with him."

Bob shuddered.

"Yes, I knew them."

"Did your acquaintance with them continue after the war?"

"I only saw them once or twice," evasively.

"And that was once too often."

Bob groaned, and his head sank on his breast.

Clearly, Paul Smith had him in the toils.

"Bailey, you committed an error for which you have been sorry ever since. Tell me, am I right?"

The man would have denied it, but could not.

It seemed to him as though Paul Smith were a judge, and he sworn to tell "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth."

"Yes," he groaned, putting his hand to his eyes.

"You have seen one of those men to-night—here on this steamer."

Another groan.

"He has ordered you to do a certain little piece of work for him, and rather than have your sin of the past published, you have consented."

"Under protest."

"Never mind. You have consented. Soon after the whistle blows, by some little device known to all engineers, you will start the steam going, as though she was about to blow up."

"How did you know?" gasped Bailey, his knees almost knocking together with fear.

"Never mind—I do know—let that suffice. What do you propose doing about this business?"

"I will give it up."

"Will you be guided by me?"

"Who are you?"

"A detective on the track of Jesse James."

"Good Heavens! I am lost."

"Not if you do as I tell you, I will keep your secret, and you shall suffer no harm."

"Then order me as you please."

"You will obey?"

"To the letter. Already I have said I would refuse to do what he made me swear to carry out."

"And I tell you to carry out his plans."

"Sir?"

"Turn the steam on at the regular time, just as he told you to."

"Do you mean it?"

"Yes, if there is no danger of an explosion."

"Not a bit."

"Nor of any one being injured?"

"It won't be dense enough for that. The scare seems to be what he wanted."

"And it is the same with me."

"As you say, sir."

His manner told that he was extremely puzzled, and could not make out why the detective wanted him to carry out Jesse James' plan.

It was not Paul's way to lift the veil to every one, and hence he did not bother explaining his reasons now—Bob Bailey was a mere incident in his life, and would be made a regular instrument toward attaining his end.

He had learned all he wanted.

Before leaving Bailey he made him solemnly promise to carry out his part of the compact, and by no word or deed to betray him.

This the man readily did.

He recognized the fact that he was in the hands of a master.

Paul Smith had a faculty for impressing people with whom he came in contact, with this idea, especially when he exerted himself.

Satisfied that all would be well in this quarter, the detective left the vicinity of the engine.

Paul was not yet done.

He had more work to do.

The colonel must be seen and matters explained, so that Paul could take his place.

Only one thing bothered him.

This was Ferdinand.

Perhaps he would be coming in to interrupt them and spoil the whole business.

"I'll fix him," said Paul, gently.

With that he made a motion, having caught the eye of the colonel's nephew.

Ferdinand arose and approached him.

They had their heads together for some time, and whatever the detective was saying, it seemed to make a decided impression on the other.

He moved uneasily.

When he spoke he seemed to ask questions, and the answers received did not entirely reassure him.

"You think, then, it would be unwise, my going to the room?" he asked, finally.

"Yes, in his present frame of mind it would. The colonel is feeling quite ugly. Everything has gone against him, you know."

"Yes, yes."

"Besides, you can make yourself quite comfortable here in the cabin."

## THE JESSE JAMES STORIES.

"It is only a few hours until daybreak, at any rate. Yes, I will take your advice and remain out of his sight until he cools down. It's too bad to think that some one had to betray me."

"Oh, he'll be all over it by morning, and ready to greet you as warmly as ever. Have a little patience."

"I'm made up of it—the most patient man you ever saw, sir."

"Then you're all right, for I've noticed that the patient man usually gets everything in this world—all comes to him who waits."

With that Paul left the other.

Ferdinand looked after him and shook his head, as though at a loss to place this party.

Whoever he might be, his advice seemed friendly, and Ferdinand was ready to take it.

Once Ferdinand, looking at his watch, found it was just three o'clock.

Yawning, he arose and passed out on the deck.

The fog hung more heavily, perhaps, than before, over the great river, and at intervals the bell rang, as a warning to boats coming up the river.

Ferdinand made his way up to the pilot-house, knowing one of the men who held the destinies of the *Arkansas* in their hands.

Ferdinand remained in the pilot house for more than an hour.

Then he started to leave it.

Just as he was at the top of the steep stairs, leading to the middle deck on the port quarter, he was startled by a hoarse whistle from above.

No steamboat could be seen, but the fog lifting, revealed the shore nearby.

## CHAPTER XIV.

## THE LAST SCENE.

It was time for the last scene in the great Mississippi River drama to begin.

Hardly had the echoes of the deep-throated whistle died away over the waste of waters, than the gallant old *Arkansas* headed for the shore.

The pilot had his orders.

He had been able to keep some track of his movements in spite of the fog, and knowing he must be near the landing spoken of by the captain, the boat was run in close to the shore.

A friendly rise in the fog-curtain had enabled him to see the landing.

Then came the whistle.

Nearer the bank the boat ran.

Still there was no sudden burst of steam from the region below.

What could this silence mean?

Had Bob Bailey's heart failed him?

The detective did not think so, for he had studied the man, and knew whereof he spoke.

What then?

Bob was just a little over-cautious, that was all.

He wanted the steamboat to get in close to the shore before he began operations.

There was plenty of time.

Besides, if the hawser could be fastened to a tree, there

would be no danger of the steamboat drifting ~~Run~~ stream and some of the frightened passengers getting drowned.

The boat ran her nose into the bank.  
A hawser was cast ashore.

This was seized by a man who was waiting and has secured to a tree.

The craft was steadfast.

"Over the gang-plank!" roared the mate.

With a united cry, the darky deckhands sent the plate over to the shore.

"All off!" called the mate.

His words were hardly spoken when there came a sudden concussion.

It proceeded from the direction of the engine, and was immediately followed by a rush of steam.

The noise was deafening—more by far than when a boat blows off steam.

Immediately the steam began to fill every part of the boat.

Above the infernal roar could be heard the frantic cries of the frightened passengers.

They came rushing from their staterooms.

Some were only partly dressed, but in the excitement of the terrible moment they heeded not this fact.

Life was apparently at stake.

The boiler might presently burst, and then what would become of them?

All the horrible accidents they had ever heard of flashed into their minds, and added to the feeling that almost scared them to death.

Even if they escaped this terrible end, there was another danger nigh.

This was being steamed alive.

Steam, when inhaled in sufficient quantities, is deadly in its nature.

Some of the most fearful deaths have occurred from just such a cause.

It is strange how such things will flash into the mind in a moment of alarm; a dozen thoughts may occur in the space of a second, when some emergency stirs up the brain to lightning action.

Those who were running for their lives seemed to know pretty generally that the boat was moored to the shore.

A few dropped overboard and waded ashore.

The main body leaped from the boat, or else made use of the gangplank.

Such a wild stampede!

The scene was one that would have made the fortune of a painter could he have seen it and portrayed it on canvas.

Added to the excitement of passengers and crew was the horrible roaring of the escaping steam and the clouds of vapor filling every part of the boat.

Jack was lying in his bunk.

Expecting what came to pass, every nerve was on the *qui vive* for the sound.

When it came to pass he was ready for it.

There was a commotion in the upper berth.

Then something dropped.

It was the judge.

Wild-eyed with fear and excitement, half dressed as he was, the gambler was for escape.

"Run for the shore—run for your life, man—the boiler bursting," he shouted.

Snatching at the balance of his clothes, he burst open door of his stateroom.

Already the cabin was pretty well filled with the escaping steam.

Through the billowing clouds the passengers could be seen like dim phantoms, fighting their way toward the jet.

Men and women alike, their one thought was to reach the shore in safety.

Above the clamor arose piercing shrieks.

Jack's heart reproached him for having a hand in this when he remembered Edith.

Would she be very much alarmed?

He had been tempted to slip a note under the door of her stateroom, in order to warn her in time, but there were too many difficulties in the way.

Edith must suffer with the rest.

It was for her good.

In the end this little adventure which seemed so harsh now, would be the means of uniting the long separated lovers.

So Jack contented himself with groaning when he heard that chorus of feminine screams, and once more set himself to the business in hand.

When would the man he was to follow appear?

Jack was getting nervous.

Nearly all the passengers had fled.

If the colonel, or his representative, did not soon make an appearance, he would have to give up his part of the affair and fly.

Really, the steam was fast becoming unbearable, and must soon conquer him.

The stateroom door was open, and he could see as much as he desired.

At length what he waited for came to pass.

From out the colonel's stateroom emerged a figure.

It was, to all appearance, Randolph himself.

He carried the small, red handbag.

It looked as though he had waited to complete his toilet to a certain degree, before flying, though his hair was awry, and his manner wild.

Jack slipped out.

His business was to follow after the other.

It was a queer thing to be doing just then, while excitement reigned around him.

To tell a man to keep cool while in the midst of such excitement was like a mockery.

Jack was burning, but more with impatience than anything else, though the excitement must have affected him also.

He followed the colonel to the cabin door.

Through this and down the stairs both of them hastened.

Jack endeavored to discover Edith.

The opportunity was too brief.

It was probable that she must have reached the shore with the other women passengers, for the feminine shrieks had ceased.

He prayed so.

She was in his mind almost constantly, and he could not help it.

It was for Edith that he took all this risk.

The gangplank was reached.

Even here the steam came, and, mingling with the fog, formed a canopy over them.

Nearly all the alarmed passengers had already fled from the boat, where the steam demon still hissed and roared by turns.

If that mighty giant, held in iron chains, could ever break his shackles, the ruin wrought would be terrible, indeed.

No wonder travelers, aroused at such an uncanny hour of the night by the fearful crash, and finding their rooms deluged with steam, were wild with fear.

The bravest of the brave might well be pardoned for feeling such a spasm under similar circumstances.

When the colonel reached the plank, only one person was upon it.

This was a stout Congressman from a Southern State—clad in trousers and shirt, walking the plank after the manner Blondin would cross Niagara on a tightrope.

The colonel caught hold of him in time to prevent his tumbling.

Thus they marched ashore.

Jack brought up the rear.

As though by some preconcerted signal, no sooner had this occurred, than the rushing sound of escaping steam suddenly ceased.

The engineer, undoubtedly, had found a way to stop the leak.

They were saved.

So the frightened travelers thought.

Perhaps they would yet be making up a purse to reward brave Bob Bailey.

The passengers had congregated on the bank, and were talking the matter over in excited tones when the colonel, followed by Jack, arrived.

Was any one lost? This question confronted them, and many were anxious about their friends.

Where was Jesse James?

No doubt on the watch for his game, and ready to put his plan into execution.

Jack's first thought was of him.

He glanced around to discover him, and, in the meantime, did not forget the supposed colonel.

That worthy hung on to his red satchel with a pertinacity that proved it a valuable affair.

Jesse James was near by.

He had not arranged his cunning plan to have it ruined through any inattention on his part, and probably he was the most wideawake person in the crowd.

Several were dripping wet.

These were the impulsive mortals who, believing the boiler was about to explode, had leaped into the river, or else the unfortunate ones who had fallen from the narrow gangplank when endeavoring to reach the shore.

So far as a hasty summary could tell, they were all safe and sound.

There had been numerous narrow escapes, but no actual loss of life, and this was a good thing.

Jack saw the man he sought.

Jesse James had seen the colonel come hastily over the gangplank, and he made a motion with his arm that told his man the game was ripe for plucking.

Toward Jack he looked significantly.

He depended on the young planter to help him out, and between the three of them, it would be singular if they could not accomplish the object they had started out to perform.

They gathered around the colonel.

It was like a pack of wolves surrounding a wounded buffalo.

When this had been effected they began to advance, closing in.

As yet Randolph did not seem to pay any attention to them.

He could not be expecting danger, and had but just escaped from a peril that had threatened to take his life.

All seemed ready.

Jesse James, acting his part to perfection, stepped up and clapped his hand on the shoulder of the colonel with an air of authority.

"Colonel Randolph, I believe?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then I arrest you, sir!"

## CHAPTER XV.

### WINDING UP.

These were startling words.

The colonel, however, did not appear to be at all thunderstruck, nor did he exhibit that degree of alarm which the other expected.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"James Corry, sheriff of this county."

"And what do you arrest me for?"

"On the charge of counterfeiting."

With these words, Jesse James laid hold of the small, red satchel.

The two men stood there, looking each other in the eye, and neither releasing his hold.

They were like a couple of tiger-cats ready to engage in mortal combat.

The passengers, aroused to the fact that something of interest was going on, began to forget their recent troubles, and crowded around, intent upon learning the facts.

Neither of the two men showed any weapon, although it was undoubtedly true that both possessed such requisites to Southern life.

"This is a serious business, sir."

"You are right, colonel."

"Hence, you figured on the consequences of a mistake, my man?"

"I have done all the figuring necessary."

"Why do you hold on to my bag?"

"Because it contains the counterfeit notes; all brand new ones."

At this the colonel laughed.

"They were handed over to me at the Second National Bank in St. Louis three days ago. If any counterfeiting has been done, you must see the bank officials."

"I am not to be thrown off the track. You have been watching a long time, colonel, and now you are brought to rights, with the proof in this bag."

"I tell you, man, you have made a big mistake."

"That has nothing to do with it."

"I can prove it to you if you will grant me five minutes private conversation."

The passengers had crowded around so that they were completely surrounded.

This proposition from the colonel, however strange, seemed to suit the sheriff.

He nodded his head.

"I reckon I can accommodate you, colonel, by stepping aside. Allow me to give an order to my men."

"Men?"

"Certainly. I am not here alone, you may be sure. On either side of you stands a man holding a loaded revolver, and if you attempt any resistance they have orders to shoot you down."

The colonel glanced around.

He could see that what the other spoke was undoubtedly the truth.

A man stood on the left with a revolver in his hand, while another was on his right.

He seemed hemmed in.

"Come, let us move aside. I have something I want to say to you, sheriff."

"Agreed."

The crowd parted for them.

There was plenty of light near by, for the steamboat had a large reflector at her bow, and seemed to illuminate the foggy vicinity.

The two men walked some forty feet or more away and then awaited the arrival of the principals, who, still maintaining their clutch upon the red bag, advanced to the spot.

They were followed by one party.

Jesse James did not notice him, being so wrapped up in the success of his plans.

"Now, what do you propose doing about it?" he asked as they came to a stand.

"It depends on your plans. Do you mean to go with me to New Orleans?"

"Not on the boat."

"Why so?"

"I have my reasons."

"But what else can you do?"

secure a vehicle at this place—a ride of less than six hours will take us to the railroad at Dunbar. We can be in New Orleans before the *Arkansas* arrives, and that is what I want to do."

"Suppose I refuse to go?"

The pretended sheriff made a careless movement, as though quite indifferent.

"A dead man is much easier to take care of than a live one. If I have to order you killed, Colonel Randolph, will be in the discharge of my duty, and, whether you are innocent or guilty, I will not be brought to trial for deed."

"If you value your life, you will do well to heed my advice, and submit quietly."

"You have had your say."

"Yes."

"Now it is my turn."

"The less you say the better. You are my prisoner."

"That is where you are mistaken."

"Eh?"

"I am under the impression that the boot is on the other foot."

"You talk in riddles."

"I shall be plain enough soon."

"Go ahead."

"You claim to be a sheriff?"

"I am one."

"On the contrary, your identity is known to me; like yourself, you are a fraud."

"Come, come, this will not do. I shall order—"

"You are after the money that was carried in this bag, it—look for yourself—it is gone."

With that the colonel tore open the red satchel, and disclosed the fact of its being empty.

At this the other uttered an oath.

"You have the bills on your person. You shall not escape me so easily," he cried.

"Yes, you are right; I cannot escape you. We must keep each other company. I told you I knew who you were."

"Well, I told you that."

"The sheriff racket does not work. You are Jesse James, the Missouri train robber."

At this the other received a shock, never dreaming that his identity was known.

Still he managed to preserve his self-possession. Under the most trying circumstances, this never left him.

"This is all nonsense. I am Sheriff Corry just as truly as you are Colonel Randolph."

"And no more."

"Why should I want to be?"

"Because, like yourself, I am a fraud of the first water."

"Do—you—mean—"

"That Colonel Randolph, the man with whom you fought your bloodless duel at midnight, is on the boat yonder sound asleep. I have taken his place for this occasion only."

"Then who in the devil are you?"

"My name is Paul Smith."

"A detective?"

"Yes."

"Curse you!"

"That will do no good, Jesse James."

"You are here to arrest me?"

"Yes."

"Why, if I raise my arm my men yonder will fill you full of lead."

"Try it, and see."

Jesse James was impulsive. He raised his arm.

Instantly one of the men covered the other with his revolver.

It was Jack who thus acted, and his voice could be plainly heard:

"Move hand or foot and you're a dead man."

"What does this mean?" asked Jesse James.

"Simply that Jack Anderson has been playing a part in this game all the while. When you thought him your tool you made the grandest blunder of your life."

"Confusion take him."

"As for yourself, I have a proposition to make you."

"Go ahead with it."

"Tell me what you know of the Dexter case, and you shall have your freedom."

This was a case of abduction the detective was on and that Jesse James knew of.

At the words the outlaw started.

"The Dexter case?"

"Yes."

"So that is what you are after?"

"I am deeply interested in it, and play your life against the secret. Will you speak?"

"You've got me in a hole," glancing around as he spoke, to see another man standing near by as though awaiting orders.

"Well, rather."

"If I tell you what you want, what assurance do I have that you will keep your word?"

The detective smiled grimly.

"The only assurance I can give you is my word, which has never been broken."

"And you expect me to tell the truth?"

"I know you will, for I can tell if you get away from it."

"Then bend your head here. I swore never to tell this

to a living soul, but a man will do a good deal to save his life and liberty."

"You mean to speak?"

"I will tell you something that must astonish you, man, and open your eyes, but no one else must hear it."

Paul Smith bent his head, believing the other to be fully in his power.

He had not gauged the nature of Jesse James as well as he might.

The other suddenly struck him a violent blow on the side of his head.

Paul reeled and fell.

At the same instant the outlaw gave a shout and leaped away.

A shot sounded.

Paul's follower had fired.

From the haze beyond came back a taunting shout of derision, telling plainly enough that the bullet had failed to find its mark.

They saw no more of Jesse James, though quite a volley was fired in the direction whence the laugh proceeded.

Undoubtedly the daring outlaw had made good his escape, and would reach New Orleans before the *Arkansas* came in.

His tool was captured, but they had no use for him, he declaring solemnly that he believed his employer to be a sheriff, bent on capturing a notorious counterfeiter.

Under the circumstances they let him go.

As the excitement on account of the steam escaping was about over, the passengers once more returned on board the boat, and in a short time they were proceeding down the mighty river.

Morning was at hand.

They had landed the passenger as he desired after all, and few on board understood the singular scene they had witnessed ashore.

Paul Smith had picked himself up and brushed the dust from his clothes.

He took his defeat good-naturedly.

To Jack he said:

"That was the time I got left; but I will find my man yet, and he will be lucky to play such a game on me a second time."

This was his philosophy.

One failure did not discourage him, but only made him the more determined to succeed.

Colonel Randolph had a long talk with Paul.

When the detective left him he came up to Jack.

"The colonel would like to see you, sir."

Jack went into the stateroom.

Evidently the colonel had made up his mind that there was no escaping the decrees of fate.

Fortune had arranged matters so that Jack should serve him, and being thus placed under obligations could not refuse to take the young man into his keeping.

"Jack, am I forgiven?" he asked, as the young planter entered.

Naturally Jack was taken aback.

"Really—I—"

"Say no more. Let us shake hands over the bloody chasm and be friends. You have won her—wear her with great consideration, for between us, young man, Edith is a jewel."

"A thousand thanks, colonel."

"Not at all, Jack. You have earned all you receive. As for Ferdinand, I've given him his orders—he may sheer off and go his own way unless he wants to get into trouble. I've heard all about his baseness."

"We owe much of this to Paul Smith."

"The detective—yes, and for my part I mean to see that he is suitably rewarded. I believe him to be a brave man and deserving of more than ordinary thanks."

That ended it so far as Jack was concerned.

When the boat drew up at New Orleans, he joined the party of Colonel Randolph, and enjoyed the sports of the carnival season in company with Edith.

Once he ran across Paul Smith by the merest accident in the world, and heard his story of events happening since the arrival of the *Arkansas*, as strange a story, by the way, as pen ever chronicled.

Of course Jack and Edith were happily married later on, and with this usual event our tale of the Mississippi comes to a close; but the planter speaks at times of the trip he made in company with Jesse James, the midnight duel, and the strange plan to rob Colonel Randolph.

THE END.

Next week's JESSE JAMES STORIES (No. 17) will contain "Jesse James' Cave; or, The Secret of the Dead."

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